

METAPHORICAL SPACE AND ENCLOSURE IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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While the political and social spaces of Old English literature are fairly well understood, this project examines the conceptual spaces in Old English poetry. The Anglo-Saxons possessed a richly metaphorical understanding of the world, not merely in the sense of artistically ornamental metaphor, but in Lakoff and Johnson's sense of *conceptual* metaphor, which reflects the structures of thought through which a culture understands their world. Three domains exhibit developed systems of conceptual metaphor for the Anglo-Saxons: the self, death, and the world. First, the Anglo-Saxon self is composed of four distinct entities—body, mind, soul, and a life-force—which each behave independently as they compete for control in poems like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Soul and Body*. Second, death for the Anglo-Saxon is expressed through a number of metaphors involving the status or placement of the body: removal to a distant place; separation of the body and the soul; location down on or within the earth; and the loss of life as a possession. Predominance of a particular metaphor contributes to the effects of individual poems, from *The Fates of the Apostles* and *Beowulf* to *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Wife's Lament*. Third, the Anglo-Saxon world is a large structure like a building, with its three primary components—heaven, hell, and earth—each themselves presented as building-like structures. Old English poetry, including native versions of

Genesis, reveal heaven to be a protective Anglo-Saxon hall, while hell is a cold prison. The earth, in poems like *Christ II* and *Guthlac B*, is either a wide plain or a comforting house. *Christ I* connects these worlds through gates, including Mary, characterized as a wall-door. Finally, the apocalyptic *Christ III* employs metaphorical spaces for all three conceptual domains treated in this study but dramatizes their breakdown even as it reveals spatial enclosure the overarching structure of metaphorical concepts in Old English poetry.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Spatial Trend in Old English Studies

In 1989 Nicholas Howe published his groundbreaking work, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, which explores the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons conceived of and structured their own experience in spatial, geographic terms, specifically their founding sea voyage of migration: “the Anglo-Saxons honored the ancestral migration as the founding and defining event of their culture” (xvii). This dynamic myth of movement was invoked in times of crisis, such as the Viking invasions which inspired Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (8-28) and some entries of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (28-31). Howe argues: “Whether remembered as a cautionary tale from the past or as an exodus to a promised land or as an impetus for missionary work, the ancestral migration from continent to island stood as a founding event in the ecclesiastical history of the Anglo-Saxons” (143). Howe further maintains that the spatial movement of the migration structured time and history for the Anglo-Saxons (34). The biblical exodus was the prototype for this movement, as expressed in the Old English poem *Exodus*. Howe explains that “[b]y offering various images of God guiding the Israelites across the desert, the poet expresses three levels of meaning: an account of the biblical exodus, an allegorical reading of the exodus as salvation, and a historical reading of the Anglo-Saxon migration” (99). The island configuration of the new homeland is important as a symbol of spiritual isolation in times of pagan invaders—first the Anglo-Saxons themselves, then the Vikings (39). To explore their own pagan past, the Anglo-Saxons returned to a distant place in their writing. Poems like *Widsith* and *Beowulf*

articulate time through space—the past is a continent away. In a convincing reading of the latter poem, Howe writes, “[t]he geographically ordered narrative of *Beowulf* may be read as a model to apprehend and interpret the historical process by which Anglo-Saxon culture was transformed from its origin in pagan Germania to its converted state in Christian England” (176). For Howe, the physical spaces that the Anglo-Saxons occupy and occupied are charged with meaning that defines them as a unified people and a Christian culture—their physical movement of migration from one place to another corresponds to a spiritual movement from one state to another.

Howe’s study inaugurated a line of scholarship that pays special attention to space as a category of representation and follows a particular case through to its implications for the identity of the Anglo-Saxon people. Twelve years later, Shari Horner took a related approach, but with female identity in Anglo-Saxon England as the concept shaped by space. *The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* takes up the question of the relationship between physical enclosure and identity with respect to the representation of women in Anglo-Saxon culture. Beginning with a discussion of Saint Æthelthryth as she appears in the writings of Bede and Ælfric, as well as visually in Æthelwold’s Benedictional, Horner claims that even “beyond the enclosures of body and cloister, the narratives—like the manuscript image—construct many kinds of layers that surround the saint and include multiple images of literal and metaphorical enclosure” (5). She continues to analyze Old English literature, from the female elegies and *Beowulf*, to the female saints’ lives of Cynewulf and Ælfric. Horner explores in these texts the “metaphors, themes and images of enclosure that govern early medieval narratives” (5). Informed by feminist theories and a Foucauldian understanding

of discourse, Horner argues that “many Old English texts construct their female subjects by means of a discourse of enclosure derived from the increasingly restrictive conditions of early female monasticism” (6). Her ultimate goal is to “demonstrate the prevalence of the cultural model of enclosure with Anglo-Saxon literary culture” (21). With this study, Horner develops a consistent inquiry into the effects of spatial representation. Women, she argues, are not only materially closed off in Anglo-Saxon society, as in the clausturation of the female religious, but the available forms of representation participate in reinforcing or even creating this shutting off of women—from the earth-cave in *The Wife’s Lament* to the crowding page of the Benedictional manuscript.

Though Horner’s study was the most attentive to the concept of space in Anglo-Saxon cultural representation in its time, it has been surpassed in theoretical rigor by the work of Fabienne Michelet. 2006’s *Creation, Migration and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* analyzes three important motifs—the creation, migration, and conquest from the title—in order to articulate an Anglo-Saxon mental geography and spatial imagination. Michelet explains that these motifs “emphasize the pre-eminence granted to the shaping, appropriation and securing of one’s own space in the Anglo-Saxon spatial *imaginaire*” (viii). This *imaginaire* falls into one of three categories that Michelet defines in order to analyze the levels of spatial conception. The first is topographical space, which includes the physical dimensions and features of the surrounding world; second is a culture of space, which comprises the cosmologies and geographies inherited from the scholarship of classical culture; and third is space as a mental structure which is composed of symbolic meaning encoded in binary oppositions like far/near or high/low. This last, mental level includes a ‘mental map,’

which Michelet defines as “an imaginary picture of the world, made up of representations of the immediate environment, of the entire earth, and/or of the whole cosmos, influenced by tradition and invested with meaning” (9); and the spatial *imaginaire*, she explains, is “part of the field of representation, and yet extending beyond it, for it is the creative, as opposed to the reproductive part of the mental depiction of reality that is fundamental to any process of representation” (8). Michelet is interested in the ways in which the last two levels, both creations of the mind, interact to produce a sense of space for the Anglo-Saxons. In order to analyze the deployment of meaning generated by the spatial conceptions and expressions of the Anglo-Saxons, Michelet examines the three motifs that structure her book, which roughly correspond to three genres of Old English literature: heroic verse for creation, scriptural poetry for migration, and more explicitly historical matter for conquest. Along the way, she invokes the related concepts of place and enclosure, distance and boundary, center and periphery, monsters and invasions, and territorial claims. What is at stake for Michelet ideologically is identity—the role space plays in a “subject’s or a society’s self-definition” (6).

Each of these three recent monographs treats space as a symbolically loaded category of representation for some particular cultural concept. Howe uses the spatial movement from one land to another more isolated to express the historical progress and present identity of the Anglo-Saxons. Horner uses the spatial enclosure of women to express conditions of oppression and regulation. And Michelet uses primarily the spatial relation of center and periphery to understand questions of nationality, territory, identity, and the control of space. Each of these studies insists on space as an abstraction, though still tied to the physical world. Howe’s ideas are the most tied down to “real” space—

there were actual migrations in the history of the Anglo-Saxons (and the Israelites). Horner too depends on the material conditions of female monastic life for her explanations of textual enclosure. Michelet is the least bound to the physical world, treating space most conceptually. While all three are compelling and highly influential works of scholarship, they are all necessarily limited and there is much yet to be done in this productive vein of scholarship. For example, Howe's work on travel and movement can apply to more than the history and salvation of a people—what about other states? Horner's work on enclosure can apply to more than just female identity—what about the enclosure of males or other entities? Michelet's work on binaries of spatial relations can apply to more than just power and identity—what about subjectivity and cosmology? These questions suggest a need for a slightly different kind of spatial analysis—there seems to be a kind of “no-place space” where concepts and ideas operate in the literature. Therefore, I seek to explore this space and fill some of these gaps in spatial understanding in Old English poetry.¹ To do so, I must provide some theoretical context for the study of space, then develop a theoretical apparatus that can help provide a coherent methodology. First, the spatial context.

Theories of Space

In tracing this path of Old English scholarship, I have mentioned the central term *space* without properly defining it. Actually, definition of the concept has not been stable through the millennia—it has evolved from having a purely physical application to a more subjective and conceptual use. Most modern critics use space in this latter sense,

¹ Others, of course, have been working in this same front. I will refer to many of them and their specific work throughout this project, but the key scholars are Antonina Harbus, Britt Mize, and Leslie Lockett. A nice collection of essays treating medieval uses of space in general is *Medieval Practices of Space*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt and Michal Kobińska.

while still reminding us that it was a concept in flux in the Middle Ages. Michael Davis tracks a few classical sources which medieval scholars might have known—Plato’s *Timaeus* suggests that space is an “ever-existing Place, which admits not of destruction, and provides room for all things that have birth; ... it is somehow necessary that all that exists should exist *in* some spot and occupy some *place*” (qtd. in Davis 1307); Aristotle’s *Physics* claims that place is “the innermost immobile surface of a containing body” (Davis 1307). Aristotelian space was “among those *categories* which facilitated the naming and classing of the evidence of the senses” (Lefebvre 1). In the Middle Ages, “the practice of space ... was never homogeneous, but always in flux, and depended on how its attributes were defined at the time and disseminated by historical agents” (Hanawalt and Kobialka x). With the Enlightenment, space came to be codified as a purely geometric in the wake of Descartes’ logic (Lefebvre 1) and Newton’s theories from the *Principia* (Hanawalt and Kobialka xi). This space was absolute: “As Object opposed to Subject, as *res extensa* opposed to, and present to, *res cogitans*, space came to dominate, by containing them, all senses and all bodies” (Lefebvre 1). While Kant did later assert the idea of space was meaningless without reference to human experience (Davis 1308), the geometric understanding of space continued well into the nineteenth century. As the twentieth century turned, the term *space* came to be applied more abstractly.

The first philosopher to deal explicitly with space in relation to literature was Gaston Bachelard, who in 1958 came out with *La Poétique de l’espace*, a phenomenological study that considers the house as a master metaphor for poetic experience. Bachelard’s concern is to examine the ontology of the poetic image, which he

is insistent on distinguishing from metaphor. The image is, for Bachelard, an instantaneous phenomenal event that reverberates within the being of its observer (xv-xvi), but is often mistaken for metaphor (xxxiv), which

gives concrete substance to an impression that is difficult to express.

Metaphor is related to a psychic being from which it differs. An image, on the contrary, product of absolute imagination, owes its entire being to the imagination. ... [M]etaphor could not be studied phenomenologically, and ... is not worth the trouble, since it has no phenomenological value. At the most, it is a *fabricated image*, without deep, true, genuine roots. It is an ephemeral expression. (74-75)

The images that Bachelard examines are “the quite simple images of *felicitous space*,” exploring “the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (xxxv). That most beloved space is the house, which functions, through nostalgic associations with childhood (15, 33) as a “tool for the analysis of the human soul” (xxxvii), “our corner of the world” (4), a shelter for daydreams (6), which Bachelard likens to reading poetry (17), and a protection from the cosmos (40). Furthermore, “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (5). The house is perceived both vertically (17), and as such “illustrates the verticality of the human being” (25), and centrally (17). Bachelard probes further aspects of the house, including attics and basements; drawers, chests and wardrobes; and nooks and corners. He comments of the functions of the related nests and shells, then discusses the poles of inside and outside. Bachelard’s study is effective in showing how the house fundamentally represents both ourselves and the cosmos, serving as a powerfully

affective and versatile poetic image. This phenomenological space is, quite simply, space as we experience it, with a variety of psychological associations indexed to the features of a house.

While Bachelard develops a phenomenological explanation of the effect of space on the mind, Henri Lefebvre, whose *La Production de l'espace* was published in 1974, develops what can be more properly called a science of space. Lefebvre's major innovation was the idea that space is cultural production, rather than an *a priori* object that is physically inhabited, which had held current since Descartes (1). To the categories of physical space, "nature, the Cosmos" (11), and mental space, "including logical and formal abstractions" (11), Lefebvre adds social space, which is historically produced (11-12). Social space is political (8-9), like mental space (26), but real in the way that money is real, though not so concrete (27). Every society produces its own space (31), which develops over time (34) and diminishes physical space (30). Lefebvre defines three ways of thinking about space: spatial practice, or perceived space, "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial set characteristics of each social formation" (33); representations of space, or conceived space, "are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose" (33), "the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers" (38); representational space is "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, ... space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (39). These representational spaces "need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness" (41); they are "alive" (42) and "[r]edolent with imaginary and symbolic elements" (41). In these terms, Bachelard's

sense of space was representational, and decidedly not a scientific representation of space (121).

Lefebvre is the philosopher who most influenced Michelet in her theoretical approach, providing the idea of space as produced. Two other French theorists of space, the medievalists Jacques Le Goff and Paul Zumthor, are important to Michelet's project as well: from Le Goff, she takes the notion of 'mental map' and proceeds from the assumption that "the values granted to space as a mental structure endure and infuse spatial imagination with worth and meaning" (Michelet 4); from Zumthor, she adopts the idea "that it is impossible to apprehend space as an objective and unbiased category. It can only be a modality of the self and its surrounding objects" (Michelet 6). Using Michelet's synthesis as a summary of the twentieth-century French philosophical understanding of space, we can say that space is a culturally produced structure saturated with symbolic meaning.

The present project follows from this work on spatial concerns in Old English scholarship and the philosophy of space just recounted, though only as a jumping off point. My analysis operates somewhere in between Michelet's cultural space and mental space, and fairly firmly in Lefebvre's representational space. The idea of space as culturally produced cannot be dismissed, but there are other ways of thinking of the significance of space. Space is in one sense fundamental to the human experience of the world, in as much as we are beings operating in a space our minds understand in relation to the physical body. I wish, then, to bring to bear on the questions of the cultural and metaphorical conceptions and articulations of space in Old English poetry, another critical tool—conceptual metaphor. Contrary to Bachelard's assertions that the poetic

images he explores are not metaphors, I argue that they really are metaphors, though not the kind he would have been thinking of. Metaphor, then, provides the methodology for the current project's analysis.

Theories of Metaphor

The traditional view of metaphor emerged from Aristotle's *Poetics*, which defines a metaphor as "the application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing; the transfer may be from the genus to the species, from the species to the genus, or from one species to another, or it may be a matter of analogy" (61). Basically, a metaphor is just using one thing to refer to another thing—love is a rose, for example. There are three features of Aristotle's definition which came to dominate the understanding of metaphor until the twentieth century (Johnson, *Philosophical Perspectives* 5-6). First, metaphor operates on the level of words, one substituting for another; second, metaphor is a deviation from normal, literal language; and third, metaphor is based on an inherent similarity between two things. On the basis of Aristotle's definition, for centuries metaphor was treated with suspicion, for if it is a deviation from the literal, then, in a sense, metaphor deceives and can be used to obscure truth. For example, John Locke claimed that figurative language, including metaphor, is "for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment" (qtd. in Johnson, *Philosophical Perspectives* 13).

The Romantics softened towards metaphor, appreciating its creative power, but it was not until the twentieth century that the very concept was redefined. Literary critic I. A. Richards claimed that "[t]hought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom" (94). In this view, metaphor is not just a

creative exchange of words, but something more fundamental to human thought, contradicting Aristotle's first assumption that word substitutes for word. Richards further explains metaphor as "two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction" (93). This interpretation suggests that metaphor cannot be a mere deviation from literal language, as it is something new and distinct emerging from comparison, and therefore not reducible to just one of the participants. Aristotle's second assumption of metaphor as deviation from literal language thus falls away. Philosopher Max Black took Richards' idea one step further to argue that, "[i]t would be more illuminating in some of these cases to say that the metaphor *creates* the similarity than to say that it formulates some similarity antecedently existing" (72). The inherent similarity of metaphors from Aristotle's third assumption thus disappears. Thus the traditional account of metaphor, based on "objective, literal, preexisting similarity" (Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* 76), though it certainly still appeals on an intuitive level, and indeed can apply in many cases, is nevertheless insufficient for explaining how metaphor works.

In his monumental tome, *La Métaphore vive*, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur characterizes the evolution of thought on metaphor in terms of a slightly different historical progression. Ricoeur notes the general shift in the place, so to speak, in which metaphor was thought to operate. Also starting with Aristotle and classical rhetoric, he explains that for this school of thought, represented by the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*, metaphor worked at the level of the word, as a substitution based on analogy. This rhetorical view, which treats metaphor as a trope, continued into the nineteenth (e.g. Fontanier) and even the twentieth (e.g. Genette) centuries. Ricoeur then traces a

movement from rhetoric to semantics, which depends upon predication and focuses on the level of the sentence for the site of metaphorical meaning making (49). Substitution gives way to interaction in the work of many twentieth-century writers (e.g. Richards, Black). Finally, using Benveniste's idea of discourse, Ricoeur describes a hermeneutic turn in the twentieth century (e.g. Heidegger, Black) that moves from a focus on sense to a focus on reference. Ricoeur lastly defines metaphor as operating in the tensions "between subject and predicate, between literal interpretation and metaphorical interpretation, between identity and difference" (370).

What arose from these twentieth-century developments in metaphor theory is what we can call the cognitive view, which explores the implications of a concept of metaphor that rests on the operations of the mind. The big difference between the traditional and the cognitive views of metaphor is that the former is a feature of language—something that is invented based on consciously perceived similarity—while the latter is based on the unconscious structures of the mind and body (indistinguishable in this view), which create our conceptual experiences. In the traditional view, creative and original thinkers invent metaphors, though they become fossilized in language as they become entrenched. But in the cognitive view, metaphors evolve from the minds of the general population of speakers of a particular language, not just especially creative persons inclined to ornament their language with, as Richards has it, "a sort of happy extra trick with words" (90).

The cognitive view of metaphor was inaugurated in 1980 with the publication of linguist George Lakoff's and philosopher Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, which has generated a great deal of interest and work in metaphor for the last three decades.

Their essential argument is that metaphor is less a rhetorical trick than a reflection of thought. Metaphor is not only a linguistic matter, but primarily a cognitive matter: “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). We utter metaphorical expressions because our thinking and our understanding of the world is largely metaphorical, especially for abstract concepts. These are called conceptual metaphors. How precisely does this work? Lakoff and Johnson argue that “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5). The way to decode, as it were, our thinking in this way is to pay attention to the language we use and “gain an understanding of the metaphorical nature of our activities” (7). Furthermore, the authors claim that “[m]ost of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors” (17), which are “rooted in physical and cultural experience; they are not randomly assigned” (18). For example, because of the physical effects of adding more of a substance to a container and watching the level inside rise, MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN (15-16).² Metaphors thus “typically conceptualize the non-physical *in terms of* the physical (59).

A good example of a conceptual metaphor present in our language and our culture involves the domain of life. Life is an abstract concept—life cannot be touched, life cannot be seen, life cannot be tasted or smelled or otherwise physically sensed. So how do we talk about life? One way is a very common metaphor that we can call LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Now this is not just an old-fashioned substitution, where we use the word

² In this dissertation I follow Lakoff and Johnson’s practice of expressing conceptual metaphors in small caps.

journey to refer to life. For example, if I am about to say goodbye to someone I expect never to see again, I could say, “have a nice journey” to give a nice poetic sound to “have a nice life.” That is certainly a metaphor, but conceptual metaphors goes far beyond this.

Consider these common expressions:

He’s without direction in life.

I’m where I want to be in life.

I’m at a crossroads in my life.

She’ll go places in life.

He’s never let anyone get in his way.

She’s gone through a lot in life. (Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* 3)

When we say things like this, we are not talking about compass directions, we are not talking about asphalt roads, and we are not talking about traveling to the beach. What we mean when we say things like this is that we understand life to be structured like a journey. We map certain aspects from one domain onto another: parts of a journey, like starting points, vehicles, obstacles, and destinations, map onto events in our lives.³ In the language of Lakoff and Johnson, the journey is the “source domain” and life is the “target domain.” It is because we think about life this way, because we share a conceptual metaphor that says LIFE IS A JOURNEY, that we can say and understand expressions like this. It is the same reason that Dante can begin his *Inferno* with the lines “Midway on our life’s journey, I found myself / In a dark woods, the right road lost” (1.1-2). It is the same reason Frost can begin his famous poem, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, / And sorry I could not travel both / And be one traveler, long I stood” (1-3). While poets such

³ See also Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (60-63).

as Dante and Frost may certainly be creative geniuses, they still rely on existing metaphorical structures of understanding that all members of a culture share. Of course, a journey is not the only way we understand life because the concept is more complex than that. So we enlist a host of metaphors to cover the concept: LIFE IS A CONTAINER, as in “living life to the fullest;” LIFE IS A PLAY, as in “she loves to be in the spotlight;” LIFE IS A YEAR, as in “he’s in his autumn days;” LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME, as in “that’s just the luck of the draw” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors* 51; Lakoff and Turner 20-23, 52-53).⁴

LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A CONTAINER are spatial metaphors in that they imagine life as operating in particular kinds of abstract (in that the path of the journey is no real place on earth), but physical (in that such paths are a real part of experience in the world) space. Lakoff and Johnson explain that spatial relations are “at the heart of our conceptual system” (*Philosophy* 30). Even our conceptual categories are envisioned “as if they were containers, with an interior, an exterior, and a boundary” (20). The authors use their famous example of a butterfly in a garden to show the complexity of, not only spatial understanding, but also spatial perception:

For example, to see a butterfly as *in* the garden, we have to project a nontrivial amount of linguistic structure onto a scene. We have to conceptualize the boundaries of a garden as a three-dimensional container with an interior that extends into the air. We also have to locate the butterfly as a figure (or *trajector*) relative to that conceptual container, which serves as ground (or *landmark*). (31)

⁴ Even more examples are explained in chapter one of Lakoff and Turner’s *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*.

The spatial relation of this *container* schema is only one of a number of possible schemas identified by Lakoff and Johnson. Others include “part-whole, center-periphery, link, cycle, iteration, contact, adjacency, forced motion . . . , support, balance, straight-curved, and near-far” (35). Each of these relations, the authors argue, is based on human beings’ bodily experience and neural make-up: “the very properties of concepts are created as a result of the way the brain and body are structured and the way they function in interpersonal relations and in the physical world” (37). Lakoff and Johnson show this embodied experience (as conditioned by our neurological make up) to be the source of our spatial conception. Any sense of space beyond the immediate physical experience of mind and body moves further into metaphor, which is pervasive throughout human language as a system for understanding and articulating a huge range of topics.

This idea of the bodily basis for structuring conceptual meaning is expanded in Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind*, from 1987. Johnson there defines metaphor as “a pervasive, indispensable structure of human understanding by means of which we figuratively comprehend our world” (xx). Johnson explains how metaphors can map physical experience onto abstract ideas through the notion of the “image schema.” Image schemata are representations of experiences, not precisely visual, but skeletal in structure and kinesthetic in character (19-25)—in Johnson’s words, “*a schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordered activities*” (29). Most often these schemata derive from the everyday experience of our bodies interacting with our environment. These schemata form the skeletal structure of the conceptual metaphors at issue in the present discussion. Mark Turner lists a few of the common image-schemas we use in cognitive operations: “of bounded space, of a path, of contact, and of human

orientations such as up-down, front-back, and center-periphery” (*Reading Minds* 171). Johnson’s explanation of the PATH schema (113-17) applies well to the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor referred to above. Several necessary parts are present in the PATH schema: “(1) a source, or starting point; (2) a goal, or ending point; and (3) a sequence of contiguous locations connecting the source with the goal” (113); intermediate stages, directionality, and temporality are all entailments of this basic schema (114). The journey in the life metaphor must have a path, which in turn must have the components just enumerated, which is how we can speak of way-stops, side-trips, direction, and a destination in life. In general, our experiences are only made meaningful by these basic schemata: “And this is the result of the massive complex of our culture, language, history, and bodily mechanisms that blend together to make our world what it is. *Image schemata and their metaphorical projections are primary patterns of this ‘blending’*” (104).

The blending that Johnson mentions in his book anticipates a further development of conceptual metaphor theory known as “conceptual blending.” Conceptual blending, then, treats metaphors not simply as information from one source domain mapping onto a target domain, but rather as an integration of two domains to create a new space with emergent meaning. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner explain this idea thoroughly in their 2002 book, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities*. Following on an earlier idea of Fauconnier’s,⁵ the authors posit the existence of mental spaces, similar to what Johnson calls schemata, which are conceptual ‘packets’ containing information about a specific event. Their introductory example is an

⁵ See his 1985 book (revised in 1994) entitled *Mental Spaces: Aspects Of Meaning Construction In Natural Language*.

enigma riddle, from Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation*, involving a monk ascending a mountain one day, then descending another day:

A Buddhist Monk begins a dawn one day walking up a mountain, reaches the top at sunset, meditates at the top for several days until one dawn when he begins to walk back to the foot of the mountain, which he reaches as sunset. Make no assumption about his starting or stopping or about his pace during the trips. Riddle: Is there a place on the path that the monk occupies at the same hour of the day on the two separate journeys? (39)

One mental space is the ascent, which includes the mountain path, the day, the traveler, and the motion upwards. Another mental space is like the first, only with motion downwards. The solution to the riddle involves conceptualizing a point at which the monk occupies the same space on the mountain coming down as coming up. This solution can only be reached through conceptual blending. From the two input spaces is extracted a generic space containing only what features the inputs share—the mountain, the day, and the traveler, all in unspecific senses. This allows us to conceive of the traveler's motion up and down as occurring in the same space, the blended space, and thus occupying the same position at one time. Fauconnier and Turner call these kinds of set-up integration networks, and argue that this is how metaphors actually work (154-59). Blends tend to compress things to human scale for ease of understanding, and can actually be compounded so that one blend becomes an input space for a further blend. The authors even go so far as to argue that the origins of human language, art, and culture are dependent on the cognitive operation of conceptual integration, but that takes us too far afield for our purposes.

Plan of the Present Project

In all the work on metaphor following from Lakoff and Johnson, the essential assumption is that the metaphorical language a culture uses can tell us about the conceptual systems inherent in that culture—the ways they understand the world. Zoltán Kövecses sums up metaphor nicely as “inherently *conceptual, linguistic, neural-bodily*, and *social-cultural* – all at the same time” (*Metaphor in Culture* 293). While indeed “[l]anguage and literature reflect the nature of cognition” (Turner, *Reading Minds* 239), they are both culturally dependent expressions of thought. Furthermore, most things conceived are done so spatially—Turner argues that all stories of actions and events are spatial stories (*Literary Mind* 47).

This project, then, is an examination of the Anglo-Saxon spaces invoked by conceptual metaphors in Old English poetry, and thus of conceptual structures obtaining in that culture, specifically how abstract notions materialize in (mostly) coherent mental spaces. I have chosen several especially rich categories of thought to explore in this project: the self (with its components of mind, body, soul, etc.); life and death; and the cosmos (with its domains of heaven, hell, and earth). Basically, this project explores the ways that Old English poetry reveals the Anglo-Saxons’ sense of space—how space shapes certain basic concepts, through the operation of cognitive metaphor. These metaphors are in some ways familiar, as Modern English has inherited many of them, but also strange, as the evolution of language has obscured earlier conceptions. My survey of Old English poetry serves two purposes—to generalize about Anglo-Saxon metaphorical conceptions, and to show how specific poems work within and push back against these generalization.

This kind of metaphorical analysis following from Lakoff and Johnson is, however, not without its difficulties. Antonina Harbus sums up the concern for the Anglo-Saxonist:

Lakoff and Johnson, who concentrate mainly on present-day spoken English, do not address idiosyncratic or innovative metaphor use, such as is characteristically a feature of ‘literary’ technique and style; and they do not look at the origin, development or transition of these metaphors or categories over time. ... Lakoff and Johnson therefore do not consider two vital factors relating to human communication: the structure of knowledge at a cultural level, and the impact of cultural transmission and diachronic development of metaphor use. (*Cognitive Approaches* 26)

Certainly “idiosyncratic and innovative” metaphors must be constructed with the same mechanics and within the same constraints as the conventional metaphors at issue for Lakoff and Johnson. And metaphors derived with “literary” technique must too. But the cultural motivation and evolution of metaphor over time can assuredly be explored. That is one goal of this project. As I will show, the Anglo-Saxons did indeed employ metaphors that are still with us today, though at times with small differences that have an apparent cultural motivation.

Leslie Lockett addresses the question of the diachronic fate of metaphor in her magisterial work on the hydraulic model of the mind in Anglo-Saxon writings, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*. Lockett challenges some modern assumptions about how metaphors operated in earlier cultures (6-13). The standard line, which I share to an extent, is that a culture like the Anglo-Saxons’ would

use metaphors of a more physical nature to describe abstract concepts that were difficult to understand. The Anglo-Saxon idea of the mind as a fluid in the heated container of the chest, which will be discussed further in Chapter II, strikes modern readers as just such a metaphor because we, with dualistic and scientific understandings of the body, know that it does not really work that way. Lockett, citing growing doubt from scholars like Eric Stanley and Soon Ai Low about what we can know about the Anglo-Saxons based on the limited evidence we have, argues that the Anglo-Saxons would not have understood the hydraulic model to be a metaphor at all—that is just the way they thought the body worked. Concepts like this only become metaphors when a competing model enters the culture and gradually replaces the earlier one, even while the older language persists.

I am convinced that Lockett is correct in her thorough demonstration of the evolution of the Anglo-Saxons' understanding of the mind, but I disagree with her insistence that it is therefore improper to call metaphors what the Anglo-Saxons took for the literal truth. My understanding of the theory of conceptual metaphors is that the very distinction between literal and metaphorical is problematic. Speakers use language to convey an understanding of the world, whether in terms one would be tempted to call literal or in metaphorical terms. Certainly, speakers of Modern English know, when they say that “the sun rose” at a particular time, that it is not ‘literally’ true—they understand that it is the earth’s rotation that is responsible for the effect of the sun’s ‘rise’ in the morning. But when these modern speakers say something like “he seized the opportunity,” despite the general unconsciousness of this being a metaphor, it still is one, based upon the generic-level EVENTS ARE ACTIONS. And it did not become a metaphor only when the first acute reader of conceptual metaphor identified it as such. It makes

little sense to determine the metaphoricity of a concept based on the presumed understanding of the speaker uttering the metaphor. Rather, it only matters for metaphoricity that one conceptual domain or space—whether generic (as in the opportunity case) or parallel (as in the sun case)—affects the understanding of another domain. At the most basic level, there are relatively few conceptual structures, most based in the direct experience of a body in space, from which to draw on to describe things not so immediately apprehensible to the senses. That is why metaphors are so pervasive in language, Old or Modern English. And it is those in Old English which differ from those Modern English that are of most interest; the interesting question is which basic conceptual spaces apply to which specific ideas.

In this dissertation, I focus on Old English poetry as a source for language that expresses conceptual metaphors. Except for the odd example, I exclude Old English prose. The reason for this is that poetry tends to show a wider variety of language, as it contains a more conservative and diverse vocabulary that expresses, one must assume, more of what is native to the language and ideas of the culture. Of course the biblical language underlying much of Old English poetry is a complicating factor. But Old English poetry's abundant compounding, much of it with archaic roots, adds a level of metaphor to the language that tends to diminish after the conversion. According to Peter Clemoes, poetry is more apt to define general patterns and truths about the world (*Interactions* 117-20); its noun-based vocabulary tapped into a deep and rich area of semantic potential (134-35). He explains, "Old English poetry's transmission from its Germanic past [is] of not only society's collective wisdom about itself but also its established perception of both the environment it needed to control and its human

resources for doing so” (68). What Clemoes is saying is that the poetry carries with it traditional wisdom in the very language it uses. Britt Mize asserts that most Old English poetry has an “undeniable traditionality”; he defines tradition as “an accumulation of human behaviors, thus always and necessarily material, embodied, and particular in its realization” (*Traditional Subjectivities* 248). The poetry of Old English literature thus provides access to the traditional, conventional, and archaic, which best preserve pre-conversion mentalities.

Prose, on the other hand, tends to be more standardized, more Christian, and more often translated from Latin. Of course, the distinction between poetry and prose in Old English literature is not always clear. Ælfric and Wulfstan have been said to write “rhythmical prose” with two-stress units and “phonetic correspondences, especially alliteration,” but without the extended poetic diction (Batley 84). In *The Poetics of Old English*, Tiffany Beechy subverts the general distinction, calling attention to the poetic features of what we call Old English prose. She argues that “Old English appears not to have recognized a genre of prose at all, rendering instead all of its important documents in an artficed literary register not qualitatively distinct from what we would call poetry” (2). Nevertheless, the present project follows the conventional distinction between the two forms.

One might think that attending to the prose would be of great help because it can directly address some of the ideas and concepts under discussion here, but this is exactly the reason I tend to ignore the prose. I am less interested in what the Christian tradition, or even the scholars of Anglo-Saxon England, have to say about the self, death, and the world. Of course they widely speak to these conceptions, but primarily in special,

reasoned, philosophical ways. This scholarly discourse is apt to adopt conceptions from sources of other cultures, which will not necessarily tell us much about native cognitive and conceptual structures. To obtain access to these, I survey the poetic corpus, as explained above, to find out about the ordinary, not the special. But once the general is established, particular uses can be revealing. In Turner's words, "[t]he analysis of the special must start and end with the analysis of the everyday" (*Reading Minds* 151). On occasion, therefore, I will take the everyday metaphorical structure of a concept as a background against which particular or innovative uses can be analyzed as meaningful. I also use a number of translations or adaptations of Latin texts, useful because, through the comparison of the original to the later version, one can identify deviations that express undeniably Anglo-Saxon thoughts or expression. This is not to say that I ignore Christian ideas as they occur in Old English poetry—they too form part of the conceptual system the Anglo-Saxons operated within—but the general focus is reconstructing native beliefs where possible.

Additionally, I borrow a technique from one of the methods of the digital humanities, text mining, though to a relatively small degree. An example of this method employed for the purposes of "distant reading" is Ryan Heuser and Long Le-Khac's *A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method*. The authors of the study conclude that over the course of the era, an "abstract" cohort of fields relating to "'social restraint,' 'moral valuation,' 'sentiment,' and 'partiality'" gives way to a "hard" cohort with "action verbs, body parts, colors, numbers, locational adjectives and prepositions, and physical adjectives" (Liu 413). Though their methodology is not without problems as it still relies on hypotheses to

generate its search terms (Liu 414), Heuser and Le-Khac are able to draw conclusions about the development of social spaces in the Victorian era. The kind of analysis these authors perform for nineteenth-century Britain is just not possible for Anglo-Saxon England, whose texts are few and of uncertain temporal origins. But scholars of this era do have the *Dictionary of the Old English Corpus* at their disposal, as well as digital editions of the poetry available for quantitative processing. I have used these tools here and there for various purposes. One is to use the corpus search to obtain raw numbers on the relative frequency of the different terms employed to refer to one general concept; this can suggest something about the entrenchedness of particular metaphors for a concept with competing metaphorical models. The other is to search individual texts for this same relative frequency, which can reveal a favoring of a particular metaphor for rhetorical effect. My use of these tools in this project falls well short of a fully digital, computational approach, but occasionally sheds some light on metaphorical usage.

This dissertation consists of three developed chapters following this introduction, plus a short conclusion. The first long section, Chapter II, covers the Anglo-Saxon structure of the self, which is composed of several metaphorical bodies and spaces—a body, a mind, a soul, and a force less familiar to us now, best just called ‘life.’ Leslie Lockett’s work is the most important scholarship on this matter, but I analyze three Old English poems, *Body and Soul I*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wanderer*, to show how the functioning and interaction of these parts are put to use in complex ways. Chapter III attends to matters of life and death. After a survey of the inherited understanding of death for the Anglo-Saxons, I cover a series of metaphors that treat death as an object, an agent, and especially a spatial condition. I treat several works from the minor poems *The*

Fortunes of Men and *Fates of the Apostles*, to the major heroic poems *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*, to the enigmatic *Wife's Lament*. Chapter IV considers the spatial structure of the cosmos, distinguishing what models have been inherited from the Christian from those which have a more native Anglo-Saxon flavor. Biblical poems like the Old English *Genesis* and *Christ and Satan* provide useful examples, as well as other poems like *Beowulf*, *Christ II*, *Guthlac B*, and the *Advent Lyrics*. Chapter V serves as a short conclusion, examining all of the previously discussed spaces and metaphors in one poem, *Christ III*.

Throughout all of these conceptual spaces and the poems exhibiting the metaphors that express them, the overriding spatial sense is one of enclosure. Just as CONCEPTS ARE CONTAINERS dominates human thought, the Anglo-Saxons enclose themselves in containers of self, life, and world. Old English poetry reveals a complexly enclosed world of containers within containers, where ideas are played out in spatial terms as movement with respect to the containers or as changes in the structure of the containers. Anglo-Saxon culture, as expressed through Old English poetry, seems to be most comfortable in a definite place, in an enclosed space, whether physical or metaphorical, and often expressed through language of binding. One could call this propensity *claustrophilia*—the love of enclosure—though the Greek flavor of that term leaves something to be desired. Whatever we call it, a clear sense of a world-view, both familiar and strange, emerges from the collection of conceptual spaces and metaphors discussed in this dissertation.

CHAPTER II

THE SELF

Introduction: The Mind of *The Wanderer*

In our post-Cartesian world it is common to speak of the self as divided into two parts—the mind and the body. The mind is that immaterial essence that we all possess, while the body is the physical, mechanical entity which houses the mind. We tend to associate the mind with the brain to give it a more precise location within the body, if not identify it completely with the brain. To be sure, many people today also consider the soul a vital part of the self. This soul is immaterial like the mind, but has less of a proper location in space as it need not reside in the brain or even the body. The mind, body, and soul are thus the most common ways to articulate the self in Modern English. But these components are less than self-explanatory—only the body has a strong basis in physical reality, while the mind (not the brain) and the soul are completely abstract, and therefore require metaphorical extension for understanding.

This modern schema, of course, is not the only way to think about the self. In the Christian Middle Ages, a similar dualism of self held, but instead of opposing the body to the mind, it was coupled with the soul; the mind then usually functioned as part of the soul. In his *Confessions*, Augustine addresses the question of who he is, first answering “a man,” then commenting, “it is clear that I have both body and soul, the one the outer, the other the inner” (10.6). The soul is the better part of the self because it gives life to the body (10.6). After identifying the memory as a faculty of the soul (10.8), Augustine claims that “the mind and the memory are one and the same” (10.14). Memory, for Augustine, is a vast space where images of things in the real world, as well as immaterial

things like facts, are stored: “memory ... is like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses” (10.8). Then in *The Trinity*, he breaks the mind into three faculties: memory, intelligence, and will (Book 10). Augustine’s is the standard way of thinking about the medieval mind.

Old English, however, possesses a robust metaphorical system for the mind and the self—one that challenges the dualisms of both modern folk beliefs and Augustinian psychology. Furthermore, what we mean when we say, for example, “mind” is not necessarily what writers of Old English meant with the words we now translate as “mind.”⁶ This chapter, then, is an accounting of the ways the Anglo-Saxon psyche is composed and the ways its parts interact with one another. The metaphorical basis for this composition and behavior is spatial—parts of the self have particular locations and operations in space. To expose this, I will examine an especially complex and revealing passage from *The Wanderer*, then give an overview of the scholarship on the matter, before proceeding to readings of several poems, *Soul and Body*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wanderer* again, which exploit the complex relationships of parts of the self.

The Exeter Book’s famous elegy, *The Wanderer*, is intently focused on the mind as the site of the trauma of exile it recounts. The poem thus exhibits a wide range of vocabulary and concepts for the mind, an abstract part of the self necessarily dependent on metaphorical articulation. In a famous passage early in the poem, the speaker (the Wanderer, for lack of a better name) expresses a strong desire to keep his thoughts to himself as he struggles with the miserable condition of exile:

⁶ Soon Ai Low, citing Anna Wierzbicka, reminds us that what we call ‘mind’ in Old English is only an approximation, not a semantic equivalent (“Approaches” 11). This caution is taken for granted with all such translations and labeling throughout this chapter.

Nis nu cwicra nan

þe ic him **modsefan** minne durre

sweotule asecgan. Ic to soþe wat

þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þeaw

þæt he his **ferðlocan** fæst binde,

his **hordcofan**, hycge swa he wille.

Ne mæg werig **mod** wyrde wiðstandan,

ne se hreo **hyge** helpe gefremman.

Forðon domgeorne dreorigne oft

in hyra **breostcofan** bindað fæste (9b-18)

[There is none living to whom I dare clearly express my **mind**. I know as

truth that it is a lordly virtue in a nobleman that he bind fast his **spirit-**

locker, control his **hoard-cove**, think as he will. My weary **mind** may not

withstand fate nor the troubled **mind** provide help. Therefore those eager

for renown often dreary-things in their **breast-cove** bind fast.]⁷

Immediately obvious is the abundance of terms for the mind alone (which I have highlighted in bold in the Old English text and in the translation). In these nine and a half lines there are no fewer than six terms that can be roughly translated as “mind”: *modsefan* (10a), *ferðlocan* (13a), *hordcofan* (14a), *mod* (15a), *hyge* (16a), and *breostcofan* (18a).

Why such linguistic diversity? One possibility is that the terms are just poetic synonyms deployed to meet the demands of alliteration. In fact, each of these mind terms does

⁷ All translations from the Old English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

participate in the alliteration, but I suspect that there is more to the story, that there are semantic or conceptual reasons motivating this variation.

Before examining the implications of the astonishing lexical variety of these terms, let us assume for the moment that they are synonymous and consider their semantic roles in the speech of the Wanderer. First, he says that there is no one to whom he may *asecgan* [“say, express”] his mind. The mind seems to be an object capable of being expressed in words, perhaps equated with thoughts or language on some level. Second, the Wanderer says that it is a noble custom for a man to bind his mind fast. Now the mind must be something that can be secured or shut, suggesting a physically enclosed space. The third mind term is a variation of the second, again expressing enclosure. Fourth, the mind is a weary thing that cannot withstand fate. Here the mind resembles an animate entity with the capacity for fatigue; it also can take a physical position, therefore capable of being assaulted. Fifth, the mind is not able to provide assistance, another indication of personified action. Finally, the mind is a space for securely storing dreary thoughts; it is yet again an enclosure that can be shut. In these few lines competing, but compatible models of the Anglo-Saxon mind emerge. The mind is a bounded enclosure, the linguistic or cognitive contents within that enclosure, and an at least partially personified agent.

The functional variety of mind terms deployed in the passage from *The Wanderer* is not just limited to semantic roles the words play; it is echoed in the semantic value of the words themselves. The three times the mind words point to an enclosure, they take the form of compounds which specify this function lexically: *ferðlocan*, *hordcofan* and *breostcofan*. In each case the second element expresses an enclosure. A *loca*, according

to Bosworth-Toller,⁸ is “that which closes or shuts, a bar, bolt, lock, an enclosed place, locker;” while a *cofa*, the ancestor of ModE *cove*, is a “room, chamber; frequently inner room, bedroom” (DOE 1) and “cave, den” (2). Both terms clearly indicate enclosed spaces, with *loca* adding a strong sense of security to that space. The first elements of these compound terms, however, characterize the chamber of the mind in a few different ways. For the word *ferhþ* the DOE has “mind, soul, spirit, heart” (1) for its primary definition, but also “life” (2) as a secondary one. The mind is now implicated in another aspect of the self—the soul; specifically the mind is an enclosure for the soul (as opposed to the body as the usual enclosure for the soul). The word *hord* signifies a treasure, which in this compound communicates the idea that the contents of the mind enclosure are quite valuable. The word *breost* in the final compound serves to locate the space of the mind in the center of the body (rather than the head as is common now). These three compounds give some further insight into the nature of the Anglo-Saxon mind—its space is located in the chest and contains the soul and treasures (whether the soul itself, or thoughts, memories, emotions, etc.).

The remaining terms for mind—*mod*, *hyge*, and *modsefa*—are less revealing in their etymology. The word *mod* and *hyge*, and the element *sefa* seem to be generally interchangeable, all meaning “mind.” They can additionally mean “heart” or “soul,” however, complicating our picture of the Anglo-Saxon psyche. *Mod* can even mean “courage” or “pride.” What distinguishes these terms from the compounds treated above, though, is that they are not spatial, locating the mind in the body or contents within the

⁸ For definitions of Old English terms, I cite the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE) when possible (only entries from A through G have been published as of this writing), otherwise the older standard, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, or Bosworth-Toller (BT), after its first two compilers.

mind, but indicative rather of a power or action of thinking. Thus it is the *mod* that can be weary (as a depleted body or power), the *hyge* that can be rough (as in troubled or disturbed), and the *modsefa* that can be expressed in words. These dynamic powers are personified as animate bodies, or perhaps treated as fluid forces, to better express their potency.

Emerging from the passage from *The Wanderer* just examined are two discrete set of terms implying two distinct models for the mind. In one, the mind is an enclosed space, located in the chest, and subject to closing or binding; this model is primarily spatial, and can include the treasured contents of this space. In the other model, the mind is an animate body whose energy can be depleted. I will therefore call these two conceptions the mind-container and the mind-body. To put them into the metaphorical language introduced in Chapter I: THE MIND IS AN ENCLOSED SPACE (LOCATED IN THE CHEST) and THE MIND IS AN ANIMATE BODY. A third possible model, suggested by lines 9b-11a, is THE MIND IS LANGUAGE, but this aspect of mental expression probably derives from the enclosure model—the contents of the enclosure, thought and words, themselves metaphorically cast as physical objects, are part of that mind as well.⁹ This short passage from *The Wanderer* thus shows that the mind, and therefore the self, as understood by the Anglo-Saxons is not so simple as the familiar dualistic models suggest.¹⁰

Overview of the Anglo-Saxon Self

As we have seen with the conflicting models of the self between modern folk belief, Augustine, and *The Wanderer*, defining the self is not easy. Understanding varies

⁹ The well-known kenning from *Beowulf*, “wordhord” (259b), reinforces the notion of words or language as physical objects collected in a hoard. Unlocking the *wordhord* is the opening of the mind as enclosure.

¹⁰ I will return to *The Wanderer* for a more in-depth analysis in the last section of this chapter.

from culture to culture, as well as from era to era. Historically, there is no stable sense of whether the self is one's whole being, just part of it, or an independent identity; whether the self is unitary or compound; whether the self is permanent or transitory; or even whether the self is grammatically a pronoun, an adjective, or a substantive.¹¹ Scholars of Old English literature have been interested in the question of the Anglo-Saxon self, especially the mind, for over forty years. Such work has tended to consider this self to be composite, with parts acting somewhat independently and somewhat under the control of the subject.

There are four aspects of this Anglo-Saxon self, as expressed in the Old English language: body, mind, soul, and life.¹² Contrary to modern beliefs, the body and mind are not so distinct as they are now commonly thought to be. Rather the mind and body are intimately connected: the physical person is made up of unthinking flesh (the body) and thinking flesh (the mind), both sharing one will. In this view the mind is an organ of the body, and shares in its fate. *Sawel* is the term used for the part of the self that can leave the body, and is clearly distinct from the mind. While the soul separates from the body and acts autonomously in death, even capable of thinking, it cannot influence thought while still in the body—it is just that part of the self that exists in the body while living, but obtains an independent existence outside the body in death. In the body, the soul is benign and helpless, functioning variously as a guest, a laborer, or a servant in the language, and therefore participating in personification metaphor as a human being,

¹¹ See Antonina Harbus's "The Medieval Concept of the Self in Anglo-Saxon England" (77-81) for a review of the difficulties of talking about what both modern and medieval writers mean by "self."

¹² This schema and the following explanation is based on Leslie Lockett's *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*, whose first chapter provides a thorough discussion of this four-part schema.

though one of restricted abilities. Finally, there is a life-force distinct from mind and soul that is denoted in the Old English by *feorh*, *lif*, and *ealdor*. This force, like the soul, exists enclosed in the body, and can only leave when the body is ruptured in death. Unlike the soul, though, the life-force does not survive fatal injury—it has no being outside the body. Therefore, the loss of the life-force signifies death. Diachronic change has blurred the distinction between this life-force and the soul, while confusion with the term *ferhð* has contributed to the erosion of *feorh*'s independence from the soul.

Of these four aspects of the self, however, it is the mind which is most discussed in both Old English literature and the scholarship. Two distinct traditions of Anglo-Saxon understandings of the mind have been identified: a classical or philosophical strain and a vernacular or common-sense psychology one.¹³ The former tradition is represented by Plato, Augustine, and Boethius, plus classically educated Anglo-Saxon writers like Alfred and Ælfric. These figures generally considered the mind to be identical to the soul. Alcuin's *De anima ratione* outlines a psychological theory based on Plato's three-part structure of the soul: concupiscible, rational, and irascible. Alcuin maintains that the mind (*mens*) is the chief part of the soul, but soon treats the two facets as interchangeable, contrary to Augustine's clear distinction. This mind-soul reflects God in its ability to remember and imagine. Alfred, in his translation of Boethius, follows Alcuin in unifying the mind and the soul, which the original author kept distinct. Alfred uses *mod* and *sawel* to translate Boethius's *mens* or *cor*, even casting the original "T" of Boethius as a personified *Mod*. One difference between Alcuin's and Alfred's treatments of the soul is

¹³ M. R. Godden characterizes this split as classical versus vernacular (284), while Soon-Ai Low considers it to be better stated as a philosophical or scientific perspective and what she calls a more common-sense psychology ("Approaches" 20). See Godden, "Anglo-Saxons on the Mind," for a review of these classical beliefs and their influence on Old English literature.

that, for the former, the out-of-body movement of the soul in dreaming is merely metaphorical, while for the latter, it is an actual journey. Additionally, Alfred seems to distinguish *gast* from *sawel*, as a spirit that moves beyond our conscious control. Ælfric follows Alcuin in considering the soul as an intellectual quality, but, according to Malcolm Godden, “seems uncomfortable with Alcuin’s tendency to use soul and mind as interchangeable terms” (291). For Ælfric, only the soul is the thinking agent, while the mind is just place in which the soul resides, and thus not a functioning aspect of the self—the *sawel* is the thinking power, and *mod* the site of thought.

Two images from Old English poetry demonstrate this classical understanding of the mind as a soul. In *The Wanderer* memory is characterized as the ranging of the mind throughout the world (55b-57), and in *The Seafarer* (58-64a) the mind leaves the body in restless searching over the world. Peter Clemoes called this motif of “a mind thinking intensely of distant things” *mens absentia cogitans*.¹⁴ The source for this motif is likely Alcuin’s *De Animae ratione liber*, which derives ultimately from Augustine and Cassian, and Ambrose’s *Hexameron*. Alcuin discusses the activity of the *mens* or *animus* in dreaming, as it moves rapidly to set before itself anything being thought about. Augustine’s relevant discussion, from *De Genesi ad litteram*, is of the spirit’s ability to see things not immediately in front of a person, while Ambrose talks about the soul’s ability to explore the world in thought. These sources and influences for the image in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* detail the actions of the mind, assumed to be identical with the soul. It the soul’s resemblance to God, according to the late antique sources, which

¹⁴ Clemoes’s article, “*Mens absentia cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*,” provides the provenance and inspiration for the following analysis.

gives it the ability to range freely beyond the body. But this is not clearly what is happening in the passages from the Old English poems. In *The Wanderer*, the *sefa* is the element of the self that undertakes this activity, though this term does not ordinarily refer to the soul. In *The Seafarer*, the ranging mind is denoted by *hyge* and *modsefa*, which can, according to Bosworth-Toller, indicate the soul. But these two terms can also refer to the mind-body conception as we saw in *The Wanderer*. Two possibilities can explain this situation. Either the Anglo-Saxon poet considered the mind and the soul to be the same thing, or the mind, distinct from the soul, possesses the ability to move outside the body as its own body. To address this question, we need a better understanding of how the Old English language dealt with the concepts at issue.

The vernacular tradition is not indebted to classical and patristic thought, but rather a feature of the language that Anglo-Saxon poets use to talk about the mind. Instead of a more-or-less consistent identification of the mind with the soul, as the Anglo-Saxon intellectual tradition has it, the poetry hints at a different conception for the structure and behavior of the psyche. Despite some difficulties,¹⁵ we can use the literature to recover how Anglo-Saxons thought about the mind on a more common-sense level. Scholars have investigated the emphasis on the mind in Anglo-Saxon culture to develop a model of the Anglo-Saxon mind based on poetic expression. This mind does not seem to be identified with the conscious self or the speaking subject—Old English literature tends to talk about “‘taking’ various mental states,” rather than feeling them or having them

¹⁵ Antonina Harbus explains the nature of these difficulties, which include the limited nature of the evidence (*Life of the Mind* 9), obscured temporal and geographic variety (9), the potential for Christian influence (10), our own preconceptions (10), the lack of any clear statement of mind theory from the Anglo-Saxons, and assumptions of individuality in poetic speakers, though they may be corporate generalizations (10-11).

(Godden 299). In essence, this is a division of the vernacular mind into a conscious self and a mind which performs thinking and emotion.¹⁶ Instead, the mind is either treated as some kind of force embodying mental action, or as a space for thought and emotion. The mind as a force or power is “something more like an inner passion or willfulness, an intensification of the self that can be dangerous” (Godden 300). This mental aspect is not the same as the conscious self, as we have already seen with the attempts to restrain the mind by the speaker of *The Wanderer*. The powerful mind is typical of wisdom and elegiac literature, which relate attempts by the self to control an unruly mind.¹⁷

Most representations of the mind in Old English literature, however, occur as a kind of space, place, or location, usually characterized as an enclosure or a container in compound terms. The relationship between terms in compounds for the mind is complicated, but generally at least one signifies the nature of the containing mind or the contained contents. There are four possible relationship between container and contents with respect to a dynamic inside-outside binary: for things inside, the mind can either hold or release; for things outside, it can either repel or admit.¹⁸ For example, to use a case we are already familiar with, in *The Wanderer* the speaker must keep all his thoughts and feelings locked securely in his mind, expressed as *ferðlocan* (13a), *hordcofan* (14a),

¹⁶ Antonina Harbus points to the elegies as clear examples of the mind as distinct from the self (*Life of the Mind* 137-41). The powerful emotions of sorrow expressed in these poems serve to alienate the self from the mind, which enables a move from a past of misery to a present of consolation, or even a future of hope. The elegies are concerned with the proper state of mind to allow for a change of mind, a progress of the self. This self both influences and is influenced by the mind.

¹⁷ Harbus, in *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, explores the behavior of the mind in these two genres. See pages 61-86 for wisdom literature and 127-60 for the elegies.

¹⁸ The primary scholarly authority for this enclosure function of the mind is Britt Mize, whose article, “The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry,” identifies and describes this fourfold functioning.

and *breostcofan* (18a). We earlier noted these terms designated the mind as a container, but they also exhibit a general situation of mind we can call “*the mind holds*.” One keeps this mental material shut out from the world because of its danger of causing public harm or shame. But protecting others from bad things is only one function of the mind as a container. The mind can also let out good, valuable things like wisdom, which, like treasure in Old English heroic poetry, should be shared rather than hoarded. Thus *Maxims I* opens with a call to open the mind and share its wise thoughts:

Frige mec frodum wordum! Ne læt þinne ferð onhæln,
degol þæt þu deopost cunne! Nelle ic þe min dyrne geseccan,
gif þu me þinne hygecræft hylest ond þine heortan gepohtas.
Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan. (1-4a)

[Question me with wise words! Do not let your hidden spirit be secret, that which you deepest know! I will not tell you my secret if you conceal your mind-craft from me and the thoughts of your hear. Wise men must exchange maxims.]

The admonition to open up minds in a free exchange of wise thoughts demonstrates how important it is to circulate what is valuable.

While container mind words do not merely refer to the location of the mind in the body, but to the mind itself, the mind does have a place in the body, most typically the chest. In fact, thinking in the mind seems to operate in terms of a hydraulic model.¹⁹ In this model, the mind is generally (though not exclusively) located in the breast. Mental

¹⁹ The hydraulic model was developed by Leslie Lockett in her *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*—see her chapter three (110-78) for a complete accounting of the processes involved in this model, which I only outline here.

activity, especially distress and yearning, is understood as heat produced in the cavity of the chest. In the hydraulic model, mental activity occurs in an enclosed space, with heat and swelling. The heated mind (as well as its seat and its associated states) seethes and wells in its activity. Peripheral features of the model include cooling, which can be positive or negative, though is often a sign of some kind of weakness; roominess, which seems to be wholly beneficial; and constriction, which is unequivocally bad and indicates distress. The head is surprisingly absent from this system. In Lockett's assessment, "[t]he cultural and conceptual niche that in MnE is occupied by the conventional opposition of head and heart is filled, in OE literature, by the struggles of the individual to restrain the seething contents of his breast" (79).²⁰

One complicating factor in discussing the possible shapes and functioning for the Anglo-Saxon mind is the wide variety of vocabulary used to express the concept. There are at least forty-nine distinct terms, both simplex and compound, for the inner faculty in Old English, with *mod*, *heorte*, *gast*, and *sawel* are the most well attested, though the latter two are usually reserved for the part of the self that survives death.²¹ All of these mental terms occupy a range of meaning covering "‘seat of thought’, ‘seat of emotion’,

²⁰ Lockett argues that the hydraulic model is not just a Latin borrowing: "It is far more likely that prior to their Christianization the Anglo-Saxons already employed the hydraulic model and attached culturally specific values to individual symptoms, and that OE and Latin hydraulic-model diction subsequently converged in OE prose translations of Latin texts" (109).

²¹ Soon-Ai Low has done the work of accounting for this vocabulary, with the results published in "Approaches to the Old English Vocabulary for 'Mind.'" Low identifies two ways of looking at such a vocabulary, onomasiologically (the semantic relations between terms) and semasiologically (the polysemous range of a given term). These roughly correspond to the semantic role and semantic value I mentioned in the initial look at mind terms in *The Wanderer* (9b-18). Low seeks to provide a linguistic analysis as a corrective to past semantic studies which tend to focus on the terms individually, without considering their synonymous relations or why these should have arisen, and as a result these studies are characterized by repetitiousness, as it is found over and over that the terms are used rather similarly, as well as, at times, an over-interpretation of the evidence in an effort to find the semantic differences assumed to be always and in every instance operative. ("Approaches" 20)

‘thought’, ‘resolve’ and ‘intention’” (Low, “Approaches” 15).²² Most critics consider the terms for the inner self to be more or less interchangeable, an example of polysemy.²³ Polysemy, however, can be more than just multiple meanings—it can be understood as a kind of cognitive potential. The polysemous range of a word functions through four methods of diachronic semantic change—narrowing, broadening, metaphor, and metonymy. The interchangeability of mental terms can also stem from a certain inherent vagueness that each possesses, which leads to pragmatic overlap. Expressiveness is yet another reason for the great variety of mental vocabulary, as the Anglo-Saxons seemed not to mind tautological expression, as seen in terms like *modsefa*. Though we may be tempted to draw distinctions among mind terms,²⁴ we could be too tidy and overlook the evidence that points to general models of the mind, which are expressed with various terms, however inconsistently. There are generalizations that can be made about the tendencies of mental words, even if they cannot be precisely delimited. And overlapping,

²² In an alternative generalization, Godden considers *ferð*, *hyge*, and *sefa* to be interchangeable terms available for multiple senses of the inner self: “mind,” “heart,” “spirit,” “soul” (301).

²³ For a discussion of polysemy and the ways it can operate in Old English, see Low’s “Pride, Courage, and Anger: The Polysemousness of Old English *Mod*.”

²⁴ Harbus is one critic who differentiates between terms for the mind. She finds that *mod*, the most common term for mind at over 2500 occurrences, refers to the place of thought, memory, disposition, emotion, and resolution, while occasionally meaning pride, courage, and even the modern sense of mood (*Life of the Mind* 40-41); *gymnd* can mean the mind and memory, whether as a location or a faculty (42-44); *gewitt* is fairly interchangeable with *mod*, but also glosses *anima* and *sensus* (45); *myne* points to intention, memory, and love (45-46); *hyge* is the place of thought, the mind (47); *sefa* tends to indicate understanding, gloss *sensus*, and imply perception (47); *ferhð* is more spiritual, the place of wisdom, and the mind again (47-48). Harbus notes that the compound terms usually correspond to one or both of their elements, and especially refer to the location of mental activity (50-54). These definitions for many of the mind terms are perhaps overly precise, a danger she acknowledges when discussing the overlap between terms and the tendency to vagueness (48-49). I will argue that different terms can refer to different aspects of the mental models, but this variety is due more to context than inherent denotation. This circumstance can certainly allow connotation to arise, but always incompletely.

generally synonymous terms can appear in contexts which reveal different mental conceptions, as we have already seen in *The Wanderer*.

Given a basic understanding of the Anglo-Saxon self as composed of a body, soul, mind, and life, all with varying shapes and functions, I will proceed to explore the ways that specific poems exploit the implications of these models. With a clearer understanding of the metaphorical structure of the mind and the self, as they emerge in the language of the Anglo-Saxons, we are able to push one step further and comment on how the poetry exploits existing conceptions for particular effects. The remaining sections of this chapter each examines a specific poem that expresses and manipulates the metaphorical self. First, *Soul and Body* shows how the two components named in the title are not so easily distinguishable; second, *The Seafarer* shows the active mind in all its capability; third, a return to *The Wanderer* shows how the mind fails in all of its metaphorical capabilities.

Who's in Charge? *Soul and Body*

One of the clearest examples in Old English poetry of how the self can divide into discrete parts, each with its own metaphorical conceptualization, and interact, is found in two very closely related poems both called *Soul and Body* or *The Soul's Address to the Body*. The poem deviates in interesting ways from the usual Christian hierarchy. *Soul and Body I*, containing 166 lines, appears in the Vercelli Book, though the poem is incomplete. *Soul and Body II*, consisting of the first 122 lines (with some variations) of the Vercelli version, appears in the Exeter Book.²⁵ Both poems recount the visit of a

²⁵ Peter Orton, in "Disunity in the Vercelli Book *Soul and Body*" argues that both versions derive from an older source, with the Exeter poem an earlier text that influenced the Vercelli production. See T. A.

departed soul returned to its decomposing body. The soul berates the body for the sins it committed, which put the soul in hell, and speculates on their linked fate after Judgment Day. Next comes a gruesome image of the body's decomposition at the hand of greedy worms. The Vercelli poem finishes with a section (itself incomplete) on what a blessed soul would say to its faithful body, while the Exeter poem ends with the worm image. The theme of an address or debate between the soul and body is a common one in medieval literature (Ferguson 72) and Old English in particular.²⁶

Early discussion of this poem focused on the orthodoxy of its theology. T. A. Shippey determines that "[t]heologically, the poem is not first rate" (33), but suggests that it is "a valuable document for the history of ideas" (35). Most such criticism considers the poem in light of the Christian intellectual tradition. It is perhaps more constructive, however, to mine the poem for its structures of belief, not to determine orthodoxy or heterodoxy, but possible popular understanding of its subject.²⁷ I therefore agree with Michelle Hoek, who explains that "[c]oncepts of soul and body are not universal truths, but rather social constructions" (274), and seek to explain the precise metaphorical functioning of the two aspects of the self named in the modern title of the

Shippey's review of possible sources for the soul and body topos in *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (29-36)—these include a pseudo-Augustinian homily and the apocryphal *Visio Pauli*.

²⁶ Vercelli Homily IV and Blickling Homily VIII treat this matter in prose (Fulk and Cain 138).

²⁷ In a review Tom Hill critiques Shippey's claim as well, stating "What he presumably means is that *Soul and Body I* reflects the influence of the traditions of popular rather than learned Christianity—the beliefs of ordinary rather than more sophisticated and better educated Christians—but he could have found simpler ways of saying so" (631). Frantzen goes further to say that "the poet's subject is not theology, but penitential practice" (81).

Old English *Soul and Body I*.²⁸ The soul in the poem behaves like another human being (what I have been calling a body in relation to the metaphorically personified mind). The material body, on the other hand, is more interesting; it is capable of some of the usual bodily behaviors, but not others, and is primarily characterized as a container. Appropriately, and interestingly, the other aspects of the self, life-force and mind, are nearly absent from this poem.

There are two Old English words for soul which appear in the longer version of the poem—*sawel* (seven times) and *gast* (ten times). Bosworth-Toller gives several definitions for *sawel*: “the soul, the animal life” (I), “the soul, the intellectual and immortal principle in man” (II), and “a soul, a human creature (after death)” (III). *Gast* primarily means “breath” (BT I), but can also mean “the spirit, soul, ghost” (BT II). The DOE more precisely divides the senses of the term, with the most relevant for our purposes being “the incorporeal spirit, the soul as distinct from the body, the spiritual part of a person in contrast with the physical or corporeal” (10), with the important sub-sense of “the soul after death: as journeying to Heaven or Hell; as susceptible of happiness or misery in a future state; as being judged after death, comforted by prayers, etc.” (10.d). Generally the sense of *gast* moves from breath, to spirit and the soul, to the intellectual part of the mind and the part of the self that leaves the body in death.

The soul in Old English is commonly endowed with animate and sentient capabilities—it behaves like another human being; this is especially clear in *Soul and Body I*. Very early in the poem, the soul is said to be on a journey: it behooves every man

²⁸ *Body and Soul I*, though longer than the other version, does not really add anything new to the shorter poem, at least in terms of the body and soul functioning. It does, however, contain the only reference to the mind (“ferhðe” 130a) in the poems.

“þæt he his sawle sið sylfa geþence” [“that he himself think on his soul’s journey”] (2).

For the soul to be capable of a journey,²⁹ it must be able to move and move with intention. In this capacity the soul behaves like the Anglo-Saxon exile who seeks a lord or salvation, or like the Anglo-Saxon hero who travels to battle.³⁰ In this poem, the destination of the soul is usually the body:

Sceal se gast cuman geohðum hremig,
symble ymbe seofon niht sawle findan
þone lichoman þe hie ær lange wæg (9-11)

[The soul must come clamorous with cares, about every seventh night, the soul must find the body which long carried it before.]

The act of coming requires a will to move and self-propelled motion; finding also requires willed behavior, but also the cognitive capacity to discern the object of the search. These are rational, human, or at least sentient capabilities.

Of course the most obvious way in which the soul acts human is in giving the long speech it directly addresses to the body. For eighty-five lines (17-102), the soul gives a lengthy peroration to the body condemning it for its sinful actions while the pair lived together. Thus the soul possesses the human qualities of thought, language, speech, perception, etc. An example of thought occurs when the soul says, “þæt me þuhte ful oft / þæt hit wære XXX þusend wintra / to þinum deaðdæge [“it seemed to me very often that it were thirty thousand winters until your death-day”] (35b-37a). To be able to make this

²⁹ A journey is implied or mentioned again several times later in the poem, either as seeking for the body again (55, 62-63, 66), as being sent to the body by God or angels (27-28, 46, 56), or as led from the body (20-21, 67-68) and seeking Hell (103-4).

³⁰ Some form of the noun *sið* occurs in *The Wife’s Lament* (2) and *The Seafarer* (2, 28, 51), as well as many times in *Beowulf* to refer to the hero’s exploits (202, 216, 318, etc.).

kind of statement the soul must be able to perceive and quantify time, as well as reflect on its passing with anxiety. In another example, the soul must be capable of physical sensation, as it will one day receive from God “swa wite swa wuldor” [“either punishment or glory”] (7a). Punishment and glory are only meaningful if they can be felt physically as in pain and joy, or understood intellectually. Therefore the soul itself seems to possess the mental range of the full human being.³¹ I would suggest the single underlying conceptual metaphor in this poem be stated as THE SOUL IS A RATIONAL, ANIMATE BEING.

Soul and body are equated in the early part of the poem as they are identified as siblings when death comes and “asundrað þa sibbe, þa þe ær somud wæron, / lic ond sawle” [“death comes, separates the siblings, who before were together, body and soul”] (4a-5a).³² To be relations as characterized by *sib*, the two must be on some level the same kind of entity, at least classed so metaphorically. Since the soul, as we have just seen, is all but identical to a human being, carrying over most of its qualities in its metaphorical conceptualization, the body must be of the same order. Indeed the rest of the poem bears this out, though with some more limitations in the personification of the body than the soul has, but also with some additional structures. What has been much commented on is the apparent reversal of the usual hierarchy of body and soul in the poem—orthodox theology would have the soul in charge in the body. In *Soul and Body I*, however, the

³¹ Shippey traces the “emotional depth” of this soul as it moves from frustration, to hate, to relish, and finally to despair (33-34).

³² See Chapter III for more on the idea of death being the separation of soul and body.

soul blames the body for the evils committed in life, thus inverting the expected hierarchy.³³ I will return to their relative capabilities shortly.

As the fraternal relationship depicted in the poem attests, the body does not behave like a subsidiary part of a human being, despite its lack of metaphorical coverage in the scholarship, which we may note from the introductory survey of the Anglo-Saxon self. Yet it certainly possesses metaphorical conceptualization beyond the basic physical, biological form of the human being. There are three terms which name this entity in the Old English *Soul and Body I*—*flæsc* (four times), *lic* (twice), and the compound *lichama* (five times).³⁴ *Flæsc* is the “flesh of the body, that is, its soft substance” (DOE 1), but often refers to the whole body metonymically (DOE 6). *Lic* is a body, especially a dead one (BT), and the compound *lichama* adds the element *-hama*, a “covering,” to emphasize the body’s status as a container for other more vital components of the self.³⁵ In *Soul and Body I*, the body is never merely a physiological entity, but rather very active conceptually (and paradoxically so, as the body remains lifeless and still).

One primary conception of the body in these poems is as some form of container. This makes sense, of course, because the physical body is thought to contain all of the more immaterial aspects of the self. In the passage describing the soul’s necessary return

³³ See Frantzen, “The Body in *Soul and Body I*” for a review and analysis of this hierarchy, ultimately derived from Augustine’s *City of God* (75-78). But Frantzen argues that “The poet exaggerates the body’s responsibility in order to underscore the necessity of physical commitment to goals which the mind readily approves” (81).

³⁴ OE *bodig*, from which the modern word *body* derives, is much rarer, with only 24 occurrences in the corpus (DOE “bodig”). The term *flæsc*, by contrast, appears about 850 times, and *lic* in its bare form alone 397 (many more compounds and inflected forms appear, but are not easily sorted in the *DOE Corpus* search). Forms of *lichoma* appear about 1500 times in the corpus (Healey).

³⁵ Glenn Davis asserts that the soul never refers to its own body as a whole, but always highlights its dissolution, reflecting anxiety over the dismembered state of the body (41). Davis excludes a *lichoma* in 21 on the grounds that it was living at that point, but it is unclear what he achieves by doing so.

to the body every week (9-11), the body is said to have carried or borne (*wegan*) the soul for a long time in the past. This is the body's chief function—to support and transport the soul physically. This physical container for the soul is often treated as a lifeless object, as when the speaker refers to the body as an “eorðfæt” [“earthen vessel”] (8a). The compound appears only twice in the corpus—the two versions of this poem—but *fæt* occurs quite often elsewhere and usually refers to a container for fluids, which makes sense in this kenning if we recognize the Anglo-Saxon hydraulic model for the mind and by extension for the body (for which the mind can be a physical component). Why the vessel for the fluids of life (mind, soul, life-force) is made of earth must derive from the biblical tradition of the earth as the source of terrestrial life (Genesis 1.24), and humanity in particular (2.7). Similarly, the soul is said to speak “to þam duste” [“to the dust”] (16a).³⁶ Dust is that earthen material from which people are made in the biblical tradition that we see in the Old English Genesis: “for ðan ðe ðu eart dust & to duste gewyrst” [“for you are dust and to dust return”] (3.19). This emphasis on the earthen nature of the body (its physical state before and after life animates it) emphasizes its material condition as something not quite alive, something merely physical.³⁷

The most interesting development of the container metaphor for the body, however, comes when the soul makes a complaint about its former life with the body:

ond þu me mid þy heardan hungre gebunde

³⁶ Lines 18a-19a seem to echo this conception as the soul says to the body “eorðan fulnes eal forwisnad, / lames gelicnes” [“foulness of earth decays like loam”]. *Dust* is again the term for the body in 105b.

³⁷ Glenn Davis, in viewing the decayed state of the body, argues that, like Anglo-Saxon medical treatises, “[t]he body as treated in these provisions is not something that must be denied in order to ensure the salvation of the soul. It is simply a physical entity in need of repair” (34). Davis points to the “four major Anglo-Saxon medical treatises—Bald’s *Leechbook*, *Leechbook III*, *Lacnunga*, and the Old English *Herbarium*” (34) as examples with a purely physical, mechanical concept of the body, not metaphorical (36).

ond gehæftnedest helle witum.

Eardode ic þe on innan. Ne meahte ic ðe of cuman,

flæsce befangen, ond me fyrenlustas

þine geþrungon. (30a-35a)

[And you bound me with hard hunger and imprisoned me in hell's

torment. I dwelled inside you. Nor could I come out of you, surrounded by

flesh, and your sinful lusts oppressed me.]

Now the soul is a specific kind of container—a prison.³⁸ The act of binding, the imprisonment, the surrounding flesh, the dwelling inside, and the inability to come out all characterize the body as a kind of home or dwelling, but one that prevents departure. A number of bodily components and even bodily sensations take on special physical forms in the conceptual metaphor. Just as the flesh is the outer covering of the body, it becomes the outer wall of the prison that prevents the soul from leaving. The sinful lusts take on the character of a tightening prison, or perhaps jailors who press or pinch the soul in the stricture of the body-prison. The hunger which binds and imprisons is a little more complicated. It could be like the sins acting as the prison itself or the warden. But the poem says that they also imprison the soul in hell's torment. Of course, the soul elsewhere says that its fate is to live in hell until Doomsday, except for the weekly visits to the body. So this statement could refer to that present condition. But the complaint is immediately followed by a statement of living inside the body. We can therefore take the imprisonment in hell to be the same as living in the body, in which case the body

³⁸ Shippey notes that the belief that the soul is imprisoned in the body is heretical, as Augustine argues in book 14 of *City of God* (32). Hoek traces the origins of this metaphor to ancient Greece, with Plato's *Phaedo* specifically calling the body a prison (272). Elsewhere in the poetry, the body is merely a house, as in *Guthlac B* when the body is described as a "sawel hus" ["soul-house"] (1030b, 1141a).

becomes hell. The HELL IS A PRISON metaphor that exists in the language, to be explored in Chapter IV, also helps make this connection. Add to that the Christian commonplaces about the inherent sinfulness of the body and the hellish condition of the material world and the passage becomes an expression of a metaphorical blend that combines HELL IS A PRISON and THE BODY IS A PRISON into a suggestive new metaphor, THE BODY IS HELL.

But to think of the body only as a material container limits its range of functioning in the poem (and the language). This body reveals a number of other possible metaphorical models structuring its conceptualization. In *Soul and Body I*, the body is mostly treated as another human being, as its sibling relationship to the soul (and even the binding of the soul) implies. The very fact that the soul speaks to the body implies the rational human ability to both hear and understand language. That the body is a listening audience is emphasized with repeated use of the conventional poetic Old English call to attention “hwæt” in the first lines of the direct address (17a, 22a, 22b, 25b, 27a). Also early in this direct speech, the soul twice accuses the body of not thinking very well: “lyt ðu gemundest” (19b) and “lyt geþohtest” (23a) [“little you thought”] about the fate they would be suffering after death due to the way their life was lived. The personified soul, in its direct address to the body, personifies the body. To say that the body did not think about these things is to imply that it is capable of doing so, but just failed through some negligence. If the body were never able to think, as the material substance of body without the animating soul, there would be no point for the soul to make the charges it does, for they would only reflect back upon the soul itself as the controlling entity. If the

body was the entity that led the soul to sin, then it must possess a will,³⁹ in addition to its powers of thought and speech, and even emotion as the feelings of pride (39-40a) and shame (49b) ascribed to the body.

The body also seems to be capable of speech, as the soul questions the body about what it will say on Doomsday:

þonne ðu for unc bæm andwyrðan scealt
on ðam miclan dæge, þonne mannum beoð
wunda onwrigene, þa ðe on worulde ær
fyrenfulle men fyrn geworhton,
ðonne wyle dryhten sylf dæda gehyran
hæleða gehwylces, heofena scippend,
æt ealra manna gehwæs muðes reorde
wunde wiðerlean. Ac hwæt wylt ðu þær
on þam domdæge dryhtne secgan? (88-96)

[When you must answer for us both on the great day, when to men wounds are revealed, which sinful men wrought long ago in the world before, then the Lord himself will hear of the deeds of each man, the creator of heaven, at every one of all men's speech of mouth, the wound's recompense. But what will you say there on Judgment Day to the Lord?]

The soul is very clear that the body is the entity which must speak and account for the behavior of the former human being that was comprised of this body and this soul. The

³⁹ Frantzen notes a parallel in Vercelli Homily IV which "clearly implies that the body has a 'will' of its own, and that sin originates in the 'will,' or the unchecked desires, of the flesh, which topple the soul and send both to hell." (79-80).

soul notes that it is the mouth, clearly a part of the material body, which must give accounting to God. The final question the soul asks could be rhetorical to make the point that the body is incapable of answering (as the soul pointed out earlier at 65a). But it seems likely that the body as an entity can speak—it just does not do so now because it has decomposed to the point where its speech organs do not function.⁴⁰ Whether the body can speak or not, there is no hope to come, and this the body speaks visually if not verbally.⁴¹ As an entity silenced and mutilated, the body is paradoxically more like the prisoner than the prison.⁴²

While rational thought and speech are the province of rational beings, the body more often seems like an animal. The emotion of lust, the animalistic side of love, is the most common state attributed to the body (34b, 44b, 48b). And in the passage where the soul says it would have been better for the body to have been born differently, it is only irrational animals that the soul lists as better alternatives:

Forðan þe wære selre swiðe mycle

 þær ðu wurde æt frymðe fugel oððe fisc on sæ,
 oððe on eorðan neat ætes tilode,

⁴⁰ Some critics advance reasons for why the body cannot speak in this poem, but do not speak to whether the body, in a more whole state, but still without its soul, can speak (eg. Ferguson 74). Ferguson suggests, however, that the silence of the soul is rhetorical, echoing the futility of its fate on and after Doomsday (79-80). Hoek agrees: “for all its muteness, the body remains a powerful sign. Its silent decay speaks more eloquently than any of the elaborate speeches given to it in later soul and body poems” (283).

⁴¹ Hoek argues: “The Judgment Day episode also illustrates the conflict between the body as the analogy to written or earthly language and the soul as spoken or heavenly language. Traditionally, the body and written language occupy the lower position in the hierarchical structure. However, the damaged and marked body is a symbol that overpowers the soul’s empty speech. Such is the power of spectacle; people believe the evidence of their own eyes more than a vocal argument” (284).

⁴² Hoek uses definitions and ideas from Michelle Foucault and Elaine Scarry to demonstrate the body’s imprisoned and subjugated nature (275-76).

feldgangende feoh butan snyttro,
oððe on westenne wildra deora
þæt wyrreste, þær swa god wolde,
ge þeah ðu wære wyrma cynna
þæt grimmete, þær swa god wolde (76-85)

[Therefore it would have been better, much better if at birth you had become a bird, or fish in the sea, or a beast on the earth which toiled for food, a field-going ox without wisdom, or in the wasteland the worst of wild creatures, as God would wish, yes though you were the grimmest of worm-kind, as God would wish.]

The bird, fish, ox, and worm are fitting comparators for the body, as none of them possess a rational soul, even though they all are still sentient beings. To compare the body to their kind is to say that it properly belongs on that level. Additionally, according to Michelle Hoek, this othering of the body into the company of beasts is akin to the othering of death, “something that can never be experienced personally and subjectively and then communicated. The corpse is always Other, an object removed from personal experience or sympathy” (277).

Moving further away from comprehensible subjectivity, the body is also called food, which implies a body with more life than earthen containers (in that it possesses energy to be consumed), but not alive enough to think, speak, or move. The soul characterizes the body as worm food several times in *Body and Soul*—the *wyrm* is actually mentioned ten times in the 166-line longer version! A good example occurs just

before the longer version of the poem moves to the hypothetical good body and soul, when the speaker describes the worm's activity on the sinful body:

Gifer hatte se wurm, þe þa eaglas beoð
nædle scearpran. Se genydde to
ærest eallra on þam eorðscræfe,
þæt he þa tungan totyhð ond þa teð þurhsmyhð
ond þa eagan þurheteð ufan on þæt heafod
ond to ætwelan oðrum gerymeð,
wyrmun to wiste, þonne þæt werie
lic acolod bið þæt he lange ær
werede mid wædum. Bið þonne wyrma gifel,
æt on eorþan. (116-25a)

[The worm is called Glutton, whose jaws are needle sharp. First of all, he forces his way into the grave, so that he then tears the tongue and creeps through the teeth and eats through the eyes down on the head, and makes room for a feast for other worms to eat, when the weary body is cold that long before was covered with clothes. It is then food for worms, food in the earth.]

Language of food, eating, and feasting dominate this passage, clearly marking the body as something more than a lifeless container or a living being.⁴³

⁴³ Hoek calls attention to the destruction of the mouth as significant, for it is that part of the body that is responsible for eating and speaking, which enables one to speak penitence and consume salvation (279-80).

In a delightful theological twist on the idea of the body as food, the soul reports “ond ic ofþyrsted wæs / godes lichoman, gastes drynces” [“and I was very thirsty for God’s body, the drink of the spirit”] (40b-41b). It is not the soul’s former body that is food here, but God himself, in a reference to the Eucharist in which Christ’s body and blood would feed his followers spiritually. The soul does not want its own body, but rather God’s body to feed upon, leaving its proper body fit only for worms. Allen Frantzen explains the parallel in the poem’s juxtaposed economies: “if the body feasts, the soul starves; if the body fasts, the soul receives spiritual nourishment” (80). Michelle Hoek explains it well: “The torn-up body thus provides the same service for the worms as the Eucharist does for good Christians: it gives solace and joy to the hungry” (282).

What exactly comprises the entity known as the body in this poem is not as simple as one might think. It is not clearly a matter of a material body opposed to an immaterial soul, as the Christian tradition would have it. Certainly the soul in this poem is distinct from the body. And the fact that the body is structured like another human being is only part of the story—it is an incomplete human being. So what is it made of? The earthen vessel metaphor shows the fundamental material of the body to be the dust of the earth. The body also seems to include the flesh as the boundary between its inner contents (mind, soul, etc.) and the outer world. But as a container for the soul, is the body comprised only of this flesh? The poem suggests this could be the case. Why else could the soul say to the body “ac her sceolon onbidan ban bereafod, / besliten synum” [“but here you must wait, bereaved of bones, torn from sinews”] (61a-62a)? If the body lies there without bones and maybe even without sinews, then these structural parts of the body are not necessary for it to be conceived of as a body. Nor does losing its proper

functioning. The soul charges the body: “eart ðu nu dumb ond deaf” [“you are now dumb and deaf”] (65a). Inability to speak or hear (though the soul still speaks to the body as if it could be heard) does not make it less of a body. Nor does its lack of movement and bodily integrity, as we see when the speaker describes the body after the soul has ended its direct address to it:

Ligeð dust þær hit wæs,
ne mæg him ondsware ænige gehatan,
geomrum gaste, geoce oððe frofre.
Bið þæt heafod tohliden, handa toliðode,
geaglas toginene, goman toslitene,
sina beoð asocene, swyra becowen,
fingras tohrorene.
Rib reafiað reðe wyrmas,
beoð hira tungan totogenne on tyn healfa
hungregum to frofre; forþan hie ne magon huxlicum
wordum wrixlian wið þone werian gast. (105b-15b)

[The dust lies where it was; it cannot answer anything to promise help or comfort to the sad soul. The head is split, hands dismembered, jaws gaping, palate torn, sinews are sucked out, neck chewn through, fingers decayed. Worms fiercely spoil the ribs, tear the tongue in ten parts, as comfort for the hungry; therefore it cannot disgracefully exchange words with the weary soul.]

Organ after organ of the body is shown to be destroyed in this passage.⁴⁴ A completely dismembered body remains, however, conceptually a body. If we use prototype definitions for concepts, then the body is most like a body when whole and well functioning, but losing just a few of its components or capabilities does not take away its status as a body. But this situation from *Soul and Body* shows a more abstractly conceptual body than a purely physical one. The metaphors of container and sentient being used of the body here would not be as important if the body were wholly physical. Their presence implies a more abstract concept of the body. Even the way flesh is routinely used synecdochally for the whole body points to its most prominent feature being that containing boundary between inside and outside. With its rich metaphorical deployment, plus its admitted responsibility for the fate of the soul, the body is the primary entity here—it blends metaphors of composition (earth), function (prison), vitality (food), and still maintains the capabilities of a rational, sentient, and animate being. By comparison, then soul is impoverished and seems to merit its subordination to the body which the Old English poem grants it.

The Disappearing Mind: *The Seafarer*

The Seafarer, as should be evident from the preceding discussion, has been discussed at length for its presentation of a mind travelling outside its body. This scene, dependent on a creative development of THE MIND IS AN ANIMATE BODY metaphor, is important, but especially so within the context of the behavior of the mind and the entire self in the whole of the poem. Indeed, right from the start the poem announces its subject

⁴⁴ Davis notes that while the five homilies on the body and soul theme describe the corrupted body, “none shares *Soul and Body I*’s gruesome vision” (39). He notes that the verb *tohlidan*, here used to describe the splitting of the head, is usually reserved for splitting of a much larger cosmic scale, thus exploiting “anxiety about physical pain” (44).

to be the self, and proceeds to explore its composite nature. *The Seafarer* is an elegy,⁴⁵ but a more explicitly homiletic version of the typical exilic lamentation. The elegy falls clearly into two primary sections—a personal expression of misery in exile followed by a circumspect meditation on the state of the world with advice for the individual soul.⁴⁶ In the first section, the mind receives the most attention, both in its container and body formulations. This mind is very active, but in a way that reveals the damage it takes in the experience of exile which characterizes the poem. In the second half, the mind figures much less prominently, but other parts of the self emerge more explicitly. The poem's detailing of the process of salvation occurs as a radical suppression of the mind, in favor of other components of the self.

Before I examine the particular cases of the mind and self in *The Seafarer*, a greater summary is due. The poem opens with an assertion that the speaker is able to tell his story.⁴⁷ He then speaks of his struggles aboard a ship on the wintry sea, describing its chilling effects on his body and violent effects on his mind, all in the traditional language of exile. Listening to the songs of various birds,⁴⁸ he occupies himself by taking them for the laughter of men and the drinking of wine. In contrast to the speaker's situation is the

⁴⁵ The Old English elegy, not a formal genre in the literature (as it is for Classical literature), is essentially a poem expressing intense feelings of loss or separation. The genre was given an enduring definition by Stanley Greenfield as a “relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation, and expressing an attitude toward that experience” (Greenfield and Calder 143). But the definition has been updated by Anne Klinck: “a discourse arising from a powerful sense of absence, of separation from what is desired, expressed through characteristic words and themes, and shaping itself by echo and leitmotif into a poem that moves from disquiet to some kind of acceptance” (*Old English Elegies* 247).

⁴⁶ This two-part structure of sorrow and consolation parallels that of *The Wanderer*.

⁴⁷ The opening parallels the start of *The Wife's Lament*.

⁴⁸ Another parallel with *The Wanderer*, where that speaker views the sea birds after remembering his lost friends.

secure land-dweller who cannot understand the suffering of the seafarer. A minor transition⁴⁹ sees the speaker longing to go out to sea, in contrast to the misery of such experience in the opening of the poem. He seeks a foreign land, and cannot indulge in worldly joys; nor, the speaker comments, can anyone, however strong, who feels such longing. Though he sees the world grow and thrive, these very things (plus the cuckoo's cry) urge him on the sea journey. Next comes the image to which Peter Clemoes drew our attention: the speaker's mind bursts from his body and flies over the landscape, only to return full of yearning and desire for travel. After the major transition to the second half of the poem,⁵⁰ the speaker comments that the Lord's joys are hotter than those on the land which must end in death; one should bolster one's reputation with good deeds. Time passes on earth, and old kings die off, leaving only the weaker sort of man here. Age withers a man as he loses friends and bodily abilities. His brother might wish to strew his grave with gold, but this action cannot avail the soul that is full of sin. Only those humble ones who fear God will be rewarded, in contrast to the fools who do not fear God, but rather will die. Finally, the speaker offers advice on how to live temperately, asserts God's power, exhorts all to think on a true home of heaven, and thanks God for the stability of heaven and His love.

⁴⁹ At line 33 the transition is marked by one of many instances of *forþon*, a term which has occasioned much discussion due to its ambiguity; according to Klinck, the term can mean, depending on context, variously "therefore," "because," "indeed," and "for the following reason" (*Old English Elegies* 131).

⁵⁰ In the middle of line 64, the poem makes this major transition, which many critics, both early and recent, feel moves the poem away from the power and skill of the first half. Greenfield and Calder call this part the "homiletic" as it leaves behind the sea journey and turns to a meditation on God and the world's condition, employing gnomic and homiletic language (287).

The dominating conceit of *The Seafarer* is, of course, the sea voyage. Early critics thought the journey more literal, with the Christian explication a later interpolation.⁵¹ Anne Klinck notes that “the motif was readily available as a Christian symbol” (*Old English Elegies* 38). A great deal of symbolic, allegorical and exegetical reading has been performed on the motif of the poem’s sea journey. The most influential reading in the scholarship, though, has been Dorothy Whitelock’s classic 1950 argument that we can take the journey as a literal *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*, though it is infused with symbolic meaning (“The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*”). Greenfield and Calder maintain that the sea journey can be taken as either literal or allegorical (288).⁵² Supporting this duality is strongly ambiguous language, noted by Greenfield and Calder, as well as Klinck: terms like *dryhten*, *eadig*, *lof*, *egsa*, and *oncyrran* can apply equally well to spiritual and temporal matters (*Old English Elegies* 40). Roy Leslie argues that the literal-allegorical distinction is, in the words of reviewer Colin Chase, “a false dilemma for literature produced in the Old English period” (680). Leslie maintains that the poem is consistent on both levels of interpretation. Juan Camilo Conde Silvestre agrees in his thorough analysis of allegory: “Rather than two detachable facets, the literal and the allegorical should be regarded in the poem as the gradual stages involved both in the processes of production and reception of symbolic meaning” (88).⁵³ Finally, and of most interest to me, the motif can be read as a structural metaphor, articulating an

⁵¹ See Klinck 36-37 for a good summary of this critical history, which ultimately petered out.

⁵² Unlike *The Wanderer* which, they suggest, resists strong allegorical readings (285).

⁵³ Conde Silvestre finds the poem ultimately eschatological, hints of which were discussed earlier by G. V. Smithers (“The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*”), James Cross (“On the Allegory in *The Seafarer*—Illustrative Notes”), and Stanley Greenfield (“*Sylf*, Seasons, Structure and Genre in *The Seafarer*”).

understanding of living a life in the more physical terms of a sea journey: LIFE IS A (SEA) JOURNEY. Antonina Harbus makes this argument, identifying a general conception of life as a sea voyage, with a “ship of the mind” a particular case (*Cognitive Approaches* 38). She notes that the elegies are especially dependent on this metaphor: “A recognizable feature of these lament poems is their metaphorical construction of mental anguish in terms of the physical realities of the maritime world, the mind as a ship, and thought as sea travel” (39).⁵⁴

The journey in *The Seafarer*, however allegorical or literal, is explicitly linked to the status of the self; it opens with clear a direction that the self will be the subject of the poem: “Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan / siþas secgan” [“I can make this true-song about my self, speak of journeys”] (1-2a). The dative “sylfum” can accompany “me” as the object of the preposition “be” to describe the kind of stories that can be fashioned.⁵⁵ Apposition links the making of stories with the relating of journeys, implicitly joining the twin objects of stories and journeys. The opening of the poem not only inaugurates this metaphorical structure, but also frames any reception of the poem in terms of the self—it is quite explicitly about (*be*) the self. Later on, the Seafarer speaks of the desolation of exile which troubles his heart “þæt ic hean streamas / sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige” [“so that I try my self, deep streams, the tumult of salty waves”] (34b-35b). The Seafarer’s experiences certainly seem personal at this point, but I think this instance of *sylf* further implies that the self *is* the quest—the testing is a matter of the self. It is his self testing the

⁵⁴ See Harbus’s full discussion of *The Seafarer* in metaphorical terms (*Cognitive Approaches* 40-49).

⁵⁵ Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, in “Body and Law in Anglo-Saxon England,” suggests that this case of *sylf* is not a substantive, but rather a reflexive pronoun. Treating it a grammatical reflexive, but a semantic substantive, as Greenfield does, O’Brien O’Keeffe thinks “begs the question” (210).

waters, which will prove to be a test of the self. Throughout the rest of the poem many other words appear which refer to aspects of the self. As we have already seen the Anglo-Saxon self to be compound or multiple, this poem provides another opportunity for exploring how these aspects behave and interact. I examine these self terms and concepts, focusing on a few particular passages in detail, to argue that the poem's arguments about Christian salvation play out on the metaphorically expressed human self, resulting in a schism that obliterates the mind.

The self (*sylf*) has been a topic of discussion in the scholarship of *The Seafarer* for quite some time, and the term's precise meaning here has been much debated. Roy Leslie summarizes three possible meanings which have been suggested: "'myself,' 'of my own accord,' and 'alone'" ("Meaning and Structure" 104).⁵⁶ Stanley Greenfield and John Pope waged what Michael Matto calls a "sixteen-year, four-article public debate" on the question of the self and what selves the poem registers speaking ("True Confessions" 156). Pope argued that it carries the "alone" sense in this context ("Second Thoughts"), while Greenfield contends that it follows the "of my own accord" meaning ("*Sylf*, Seasons, Structure and Genre"). Klinck notes that this *sylf* is often understood as emphatic and taken in "its usual sense as emphasizing that the speaker's experience is very personal" (*Old English Elegies* 133). Matto comments that "though critical consensus has settled on one self and one dramatic voice, we should not therefore close the book on *sylf*" (157). He goes on to challenge the assumption that modern critics can

⁵⁶ Orton considers the possibility of this passage signaling a change in speaking voice, a position reflecting the dialogue theory of the poem best exemplified in Pope's "Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*." But Orton concludes that "it is incredible that the poet would have felt able to rely on the word *sylf* alone to signal a change of speaker, especially as it could have other meanings in the context" ("Form & Structure" 360).

take the Anglo-Saxon self in modern terms, and direct attention to the questions of subjectivity (its location) and performativity (through confession) raised by the poem's treatment of the self. Matto argues:

The speaker distances himself from his own body, establishing a metaphorical relationship between the body and the speaking "I" that appears to be prerequisite to his telling a true story of the *sylf*. The desire to relocate his subjectivity exclusively with the speaking "I," however, becomes a problem for the speaker as the poem progresses. His analysis of his *sylf* then requires defining the relationship between the self-as-subject and the self-as-object. (158-59)

I agree with Matto that the speaker has trouble locating his subjectivity, but think the problems are both more personal and more general. I will return to explain this, but first I will examine the ways that the poem expresses all the aspects of his self, including mind, body, life-force, and soul.

Like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* contains examples of the chest cavity as the site of emotions and other internal mental activity. Early on the speaker mentions some specifics of what he is about to relate about his experiences—how he has experienced "bitre breostceare" ["bitter breast-care"] (4a). The latter term is often translated as "care of the heart" to convey an emotional resonance, but since the Anglo-Saxon breast is not only the place for the emotional, but also the thinking mind, the anxiety the Seafarer feels can be more a matter of thought than a modern reader, who identifies the heart primarily with emotion, might think. The poem is thus explicitly a thoughtful meditation on a life, as well as a powerful manifestation of affective experience. Yet the mind-container also

remains the place for emotion to occur, as when the cuckoo inspires sorrow “bitter in breosthord” [“bitter in the breast-hoard”] (55a). Such emotions, while cruel, occupy the hoard in the chest, a place to store treasure (BT IV).

Remembering these emotions, the speaker of *The Seafarer* discusses their effects in metaphorical ways that expose Anglo-Saxon conceptions for the workings of the internal person: the cold climate afflicts the speaker “þær þa ceare seofedun / hat’ ymb heortan; hungor innan slat / merewerges mod” [“where cares sighed hot around my heart; hunger tore from within the mind of the sea-weary one”] (10b-12a). The cares here are expressed as metaphorical in nature as they are capable of sighing, complaining or lamenting.⁵⁷ Since they are located around the heart, the cares must be in the pectoral space of the body, which, as we have seen, was the primary seat of the embodied mind for the Anglo-Saxons. This mind is a container whose contents are words of anxiety, like the thoughts we have seen in *The Wanderer*, and even thoughts later in *The Seafarer*, when it is explicitly stated that the “heortan gepohtas” [“heart’s thoughts”] (34a) “cnyssað” [“agitate”] (33b) the Seafarer.⁵⁸ The reason such cares and thoughts are hot and agitating is that they are operating as fluid in a closed container, which, in the hydraulic model of the mind, become heated and exert pressure with the activity of emotional distress. Hunger is another type of internal force operating this system; it could be a personified body acting within the body, and in this case tearing at the mind, whether itself another body or the container of the breast. Alternatively hunger could be another

⁵⁷ Klinck also notes that these cares are personified (*Old English Elegies* 128).

⁵⁸ Klinck (*Old English Elegies* 132), Matto (“True Confessions” 168), and Sobecki (“Interpretation” 128-29) all discuss the difficulty of translation this passage, which can either mean that the thoughts trouble the Seafarer’s heart or his thoughts of the heart trouble him.

kind of thought or emotional force which in an excited state ruptures the mind as a container. Whichever of these possible metaphorical models hold in these lines, their metaphorical entailments, already inherent in the language, are here exploited to convey the violent effects of troubled thought and emotion upon the self. The mind as an enclosed space grows hot and ruptures with the distress of painful mental activity within. This mental space of the body cannot hold its integrity under the stress of painful thoughts and emotions.⁵⁹

The mind of the Seafarer is at other times more clearly a body, a personified agent capable of behaving like another human being. For example, when the speaker notes the birds calling out in the cold and wet environment, he muses that “ne ænig hleomæga / feascaftig ferð frefran meahte” [“no shelter-kin might comfort a poor spirit”] (25b-26b). These unavailable kin are called “shelter-kin” to indicate near relations who are obliged to offer protection to one traveling (BT). They might be contrasted with the birds who clearly cannot provide any assistance to the Seafarer as he travels alone. Most interesting here, though, is what these entities cannot comfort—a *ferhð*, rather than a person. The act of providing physical comfort or emotional consolation is one that normally applies to a whole person—the body and mind. Here the comfort would be specifically for the mental part of the person. This emphasis puts the mind in the place of the person, which we have seen reflects one of the primary metaphorical mind models, and also forcefully highlights the mind as the object of distress in the poem. It is the mind that needs comfort in the wasteland of *The Seafarer*, for the mind, not the unthinking flesh, suffers the torment of

⁵⁹ Matto considers this scene to be an expression of an initial unity of mind and body in suffering, as cold grips and body and heat afflicts the mind, though he does acknowledge that a fundamental opposition might be driving these experiences of temperature (“True Confessions” 167).

exile. The consolation provided by the second half of the poem, a rational discourse on transience and heavenly reward, can be best received and appreciated by the mind.

While it fails to receive comfort, this mind still functions as another being urging him on his way: “monað modes lust” [“desire of mind exhorts me”] (36a). The verb *manian* is usually one of admonishment or exhortation, thus implying a rational being performing the action of the verb; but it can also mean “remind,” which can be attributed to objects as well as to people. This mind also specifically urges the “ferð to feran” [“mind to travel”] (37a). We could say that now the mind urges the mind to go, indicating a split between aspects of the self with one mind directing and the other subject. The Seafarer, without human companionship, must settle for the company implied by the two levels of animate being in the mind. Similarly, a short time later, the speaker comments that the growth of the beautiful earth admonishes him to continue on as well. It is not the “I” of the speaker they urge, though, but again his mind: “ealle þa gemoniað ... sefan to siþe” [“all these things admonish the mind to journey”] (51a). This mind here seems the primary subject of the journey, the agent in charge of the speaker’s self. It is a somewhat disorienting circumstance to have the mind be at once identified with the Seafarer and a companion for him on his journey. But that is precisely the situation, not only because the Anglo-Saxon mind has several conflicting models available for its operation, but also because *The Seafarer* is an artistic creation centered on a process of mental exploration and development.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ For Michael Matto, the syntactic ambivalence in the lines considered in the last few paragraphs show the speaker’s confusion about the state of his own self—are the mind conceptions the subjects of the verbs *cnyssan* and *manian* or their objects? Subject-object confusion on a personal scale is the trouble for the Seafarer in the poem and for its audience (“True Confessions” 168-9).

This motive becomes abundantly clear in the poem's most notable passage, the one Clemoes focuses on in his influential essay. In the middle of *The Seafarer*, just before the poem moves from the more personal part of the poem to the "homiletic" section, the mind as a body takes full advantage of that status to burst from the body and fly over the landscape, only to return full of yearning and desire for travel:

Forþon nu min **hyge** hweorfeð ofer **hreþerlocan**,
min **modsefa** mid mereflode
ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig, gielleð anfloga,
hweteð on hwælweg **hreþer** unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu. (58-64a)

[Therefore now my **mind** turns over the **breast-locker**; my **mind** with the sea-flood over the whale's home wanders widely the corners of the earth, comes back to me eager and greedy; the lone flier cries, urges my **heart** on the whale-way without hindrance over floods of the sea.]

Note the many familiar words for the mind (in bold) as the passage employs both mind-body and mind-container terms interchangeably to express the idea that the entity ranges throughout the vast world as the Seafarer makes his spiritual or metaphorical journey through life in excited anticipation. Already a fellow traveler and exhorting companion, the Seafarer's mind now acts like an advance scout who searches ahead for a clear path. This mind has wandered the whole wide world without hindrance, thus performing actions beyond the capabilities of a simple human body. Now the active body of the mind

can travel over the water and even, as an *anfloga*, fly over the landscape.⁶¹ With these capabilities the mind resembles descriptions of memory⁶² and the soul.⁶³ But the Seafarer's mind's wide-ranging wanderings are more an act of imaginative foresight⁶⁴ or worldly reflection.⁶⁵ In this first disappearance of the mind, it eventually returns to him.

The examples of mind language treated so far come exclusively from the first half of the poem. This is no accident—after the homiletic turn, thirty lines go by with only one mention of any of the four aspects of the self we have been considering—mind, body, life or soul.⁶⁶ Only in the last twenty-five or so lines of the poem do these terms again appear with some frequency. And even then they are much less metaphorical and

⁶¹ The reference of the term *anfloga* is debated in the scholarship. I. L. Gordon recognizes with Clemons that “the Seafarer’s spirit [which] passes beyond the confines of his breast and returns to him again” (*Seafarer* 41), but takes the *anfloga* to refer back to the cuckoo in line 53 (41-2). For Gordon, if this were the mind, “the emphasis on the cries, which could have little or no metaphorical significance, would make such an image almost absurd” (41). Orton agrees that the term refers to the cuckoo (“Form & Structure” 366; “*Seafarer* 58-64a” 453-6), but Leslie finds the reference to a term nine lines back “difficult to accept” (109). Pope splits the difference to say that the *anfloga* is a metaphor for the speaker’s mind characterized as a bird of prey (“Dramatic Voices” 192-3 n. 39), a position with which Leslie concurs (109). Smithers considers *anfloga* an attack of disease (20-22), though Leslie doubts it on phonological grounds (109).

⁶² As in *The Wanderer* (56-57) treated below.

⁶³ Hultin notes that medieval “writers as Ælfric ... remark that ‘gif seo sawul forlæt þonne lichoman þonne swælt seo lichoma’ (‘if the soul leave the body, then the body dies’)” (“The External Soul” 39). Clemons also cites Gregory’s *Dialogues* (specifically one on St. Benedict) as an example of the soul leaving the body in flight (69).

⁶⁴ Orton explains that “the seafarer rehearses the voyage he is planning in his mind, and this both reflects and sharpens his keenness to embark” (“Form and Structure” 366).

⁶⁵ Matto argues that at this point in the poem, “the seafarer is searching for a way to have his body and lose it too” (“True Confessions” 172). What Matto means is that if the mind left the body permanently in a renunciation of this world, it would leave no room for a “detachable” soul and thus no room for salvation. Matto remains hung up, however, on a firm binary of inner and outer for mind and body, that he does not see breaking down until the second half of the poem (174).

⁶⁶ The word *lif* does appear immediately following the wide-ranging mind passage, but the sense of the word here is usually taken to be the condition of living. The speaker comments that “forþon me hatran sind / dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif” [“therefore hotter to me are the joys of the Lord than this dead life”] (64b-65b). I wonder, though, if it could be the life-force aspect of the self. That the Lord’s joys are hot could be an indication of the hydraulic model of the mind, in which case they are present inside the body and are so dynamic or energetic that they create heat and thus suggest excitement. The dead life, on the other hand, also resides in the space of the body, but, being dead, does not move the speaker at all.

much more comprehensive in representing the whole self, rather than just the mind, as was the case in the first half of the poem. What happens in the intervening lines is a turn to thoughts of the inevitability of death, the proper behavior for one while alive, and the transience of life. In keeping with these themes, the discussion of the self proceeds in much more general, abstract, and impersonal terms.

In this second half of *The Seafarer*, the life-force part of the self is invoked to communicate death. One dies when one of three things (disease, age, violence) “feorh oðþringeð” [“deprives life”] (71b). One can no longer feel or act “þonne him þæt feorg losað” [“when life escapes from him”] (94b).⁶⁷ The body, as “se flæschoma” (94a), is invoked in connection to this last expression, as the part of the self from which life escapes. This body is characterized for its function as flesh-covering, merely the housing for the more dynamic and essential parts of the self. The soul receives one mention a few lines later, and is portrayed in a fairly limited way as well. Gold cannot provide help for “þære sawle þe biþ synna ful” [“the soul which is full of sins”] (100). This soul, portrayed as the container of sins, is not characterized as an active, spiritual body leaving the material body, as we saw with *Soul and Body*, but rather as another enclosure like the material body of the “flæschoma” (94a), or the mind container of the “hreþerlocan” (58b).

The mind, so prominent in the first half of the poem, is mentioned only four times in the second half. It is one of the things the dead person cannot use: he may not “mid

⁶⁷ Another instance of *lif*, again usually taken to be the condition of living, occurs at the end of the poem: heaven is the place “þær is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes” [“where life depends on the Lord’s love”] (121). This case would also make sense if *lif* was the life-force—when it has been lost in death, it reattaches itself to God or God’s love in heaven. The force of the verb “gelong” is now much more physical because the entity of life must have a place to occupy. Since the rest of the poem treats the self parts in this way, it is hard not to see it happening here as well.

hyge þencan” [“think with mind”] (96b). It is what God supports in the humble man: “meotod him þæt mod gestapelað” [“the Measurer strengthens his mind”] (108a). It is what one must guide with: “stieran mon sceal strongum mode” [“one must steer with a strong mind”] (109a).⁶⁸ And it is compared to God and fate: “wyrd biþ swiþre, / meotud meahtigra þonne ænges monnes gehygd” [“fate is stronger, the Measurer mightier than any mind of man”] (115b-16b). None of these instances of the mind has the metaphorical depth we saw early in the poem—there are no enclosures housing thoughts, feelings, or memories; there are no energetic entities breaking loose from the body. These minds are instead more abstract forces, like that which Godden describes (298-304), notable primarily for what they can and cannot do—one cannot think with the mind, God strengthens the mind, one must restrain the mind, and the mind is not as strong as God.⁶⁹ This mind, as a force, is most closely related to the metaphor of the mind as an animate body, since it is able to be strengthened and controlled; it is also compared to God, always personified, and fate, which certainly can be personified as well.

The behavior of the self in *The Seafarer*’s second-half is simpler than in the first half. Now the self is primarily discussed in the action of the life-force leaving the containing body in death, or with a weak mind in need of strengthening. Having experienced the ordeal of the journey of life and spiritual search for meaning, the speaker

⁶⁸ I should note that the MS originally has *mod* in place of *mon* in this line, though it is “almost universally amended” (Klinck, *Old English Elegies* 143), due to the same line appearing in *Maxims I* (50a) with *mon*. But, in light of the present discussion about the behavior of the mental components of the self, it is interesting to consider whether *mod* might make sense: “a mind must steer with a strong mind.” Since the mind is at the same time the location of the subject and an aid in guiding, the apparent tautology is actually just another statement of the inner workings of a compound self.

⁶⁹ Harbus notes that the fact that the mind can even be compared to the extremely powerful forces of fate and God places them all in the same league, a testament to the Anglo-Saxon regard for the mind as an important entity (*Life of the Mind* 156).

focuses on the mechanics of living and dying. Death will come, and it will happen when the body loses its life. A soul full of sins is no help. And a mind must be continually fortified to achieve any reward after death. *The Seafarer* returns to these gnomic pronouncements on the effects on the self in the process of living and dying. There is nothing unexpected in the metaphors, just as there is nothing unexpected in life and death if one has the wisdom to understand. The contradictory conceptions of the mind that characterize the struggle of the search for wisdom early in the poem give way to metaphorical stability in the consolation of the poem's conclusion.

The Seafarer is an exploration, not just of the search for Christian wisdom, but also of the ways this process affects the functional understanding of the composite self. The self, in fact, undergoes a shift in emphasis. The pains of suffering in this world, even those necessary for achieving wisdom, break the mind down—its boundaries break and its energy evaporates in futility. This very personal mind is weak and fallible, like the transient world. When the personal mind is gone, however, all one is left with, all the poem is left with, are the bare parts of the self. That fact is communicated in the poem by the shift in its representation of the self. The complex metaphorical drama of the first half gives way to bare anatomy and near-mechanical processes in the second. There the body is the shell for the life force, whose departure from the body signifies death.⁷⁰ There the soul is a receptacle for sins. There the mind is a passive body relegated to object position, and always lacking, in need of reinforcement. As Michael Matto points out, the poem shifts from the first person to the third in this transition as well (“True Confessions” 174). This state of affairs follows from its utter breakdown in the first half. No personal

⁷⁰ See Chapter III for more on this metaphorical operation.

thoughts or feelings remain once that mind disintegrates. What Leslie says of the fate of traditional values in the poem can apply to the status of the self: “The seafarer states the facts and lets them speak for themselves” (113).

That, I think, is the point of this kind of spiritual journey—the complete release of the individual, private, personal self. Only this release, along with the physical process of dying, can lead to salvation. Peter Orton, considering the poem an argument to “persuade all men to cease, as he [the Seafarer] has done, from putting trust in the things of this world and turn to God,” asks “What practical advice can he offer?” (“Form and Structure” 369). In addition to his answer, “the more depressing and universal signs of human mortality and general earthly decline,” I will add the fate of the self—salvation is articulated in physical terms at the site of the self, and the conceptual metaphorical models for the self are necessary for understanding this process. Much in the same way that Orton argues the poem redefines home and exile (374), I would say it redefines the self, and in a very depersonalizing (and troubling for many modern readers) way.⁷¹

Thus *The Seafarer* is indeed an allegorical journey of salvation, but one that also operates on the most local level—the individual self, which in the end behaves just like every other self, and indeed everything in the transient world, including metaphor itself. Metaphor, which expresses the abstract in terms of the physical, is no longer needed in death and in Christian salvation. The paucity of metaphor later in the poem implies a

⁷¹ Michael Matto echoes this understanding of the poem when he considers the status of the self in the poem as “one that troubles the seafarer because he cannot pin it down. ... [T]he seafarer must deconstruct this binary before he comes to a full Christian understanding of the self” (“True Confessions” 160). Matto further explains the Seafarer’s paradoxical discovery that the moment “when the intimate knowledge of the self as ‘inextricably’ a part of the physical world is also the moment of extrication of the self from that world” (166). The ultimate consolation of the poem is the realization of the *sylf* as both subject and object (178).

paradoxical movement away from the abstract to the physical as the personal gives way to the general. In an inversion of normal understanding, the personal self is abstract, while the enduring truths of death, wisdom and God are real, physical, and lasting. But it is *The Wanderer* that makes this case even more clearly, so I return now to that poem.

The Mind Fails (and a Good Thing Too): *The Wanderer*

In the introductory section of this chapter, I brought up *The Wanderer* in order to accomplish two things—demonstrate an Anglo-Saxon interest in the mind, and reveal the complex nature of that mind. That passage from *The Wanderer* (9b-18) exposed two distinct models of the mind—a mind-container and a mind-body—as communicated by both semantic role and semantic value. This analysis led us to an overview of the scholarship on the Anglo-Saxon self. The scholars reviewed each offered their own analysis of the Anglo-Saxon mind. For Clemoes the mind was capable of out-of-body flight. For Godden, this capability of the mind was attributed to the soul. Godden also added a rather vague notion of the *mod* as a mental power. For Mize the mind was a container. And for Lockett it operated as a cardiocentric hydraulic system. Each of these descriptions is accurate, but limited if taken in isolation. The explanations all rely on one of the two mind models uncovered in our first look at *The Wanderer*. Clemoes and Godden both rely on the mind-body model, while Mize and Lockett describe operations of the mind-container. While none of these critics advance their explanations as complete and exhaustive models for the mind, each addresses only some aspect of the mind. In the analyses of *Soul and Body* and *The Seafarer*, I explored how the various metaphorical conceptions of the self are put to use in poetry—I would now like to return to *The*

Wanderer with the same kind of analysis and investigate its own metaphorical drama of the self.

The Wanderer's problem is his mind; the body, soul, and life-force are little mentioned in the poem. The speaker spends the poem struggling to control the various aspects of the mind, just as they combat one another in an apparent battle for dominance. As *The Seafarer* is a poem about the self, *The Wanderer* is very much about the mind. The speaker's condition of isolated exile allows for this focus to develop. Consider the language of the poem that relates to the person of the poem's subject. The Wanderer is never given a name in the poem, but is identified by a few revealing labels and characteristics in the opening section of the poem (1-7), which serves to set up the subject and his situation. The first word that describes the Wanderer in the poem is *anhaga* (1a), a "solitary" or "lonely being" (DOE).⁷² Similarly, in the first line of direct speech in the poem, he qualifies his position as *ana* (8a), "alone" (DOE A.4.e). These designations emphasize the Wanderer's solitude, as he lives in the isolation of exile.⁷³ These terms also single out the Wanderer as the subject of examination and experience, the poem possibly an experiment in the behavior of the isolated individual. Exile is a condition that forces an ordinarily social being to exist on his own terms. In the exilic setting, there is no one else around to interact with, so he can only interact with himself, which indeed he does. We have already seen that the Anglo-Saxon self is not unitary, a state which opens

⁷² He is identified this way again in line 40 when sorrow and sleep "earnne anhogan oft gebindað" ["often bind the wretched loner"].

⁷³ The details in the rest of the poem characterize this solitary existence with exile's conventional trappings—distance, water, and cold. Lines 3-5a demonstrate this condition clearly: the Wanderer "geond lagulade longe sceolde / hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ, / wadan wræclastas" ["long must stir with his hands the frost-cold sea, travel exile-paths"].

the Wanderer up to internal dialogue. Through introspection, the Wanderer reveals various minds, as the parts of himself each act somewhat independently of one another, but still must deal with each other. With no one else around to draw his attention and his intention, we can catch a glimpse of what it means to be an individual who is also corporate, and not just in the usual sense of Anglo-Saxon identity as defined by relation to a social structure, but internally composed of discrete parts.

One other term characterizes the Wanderer in the early lines of the poem—*eardstapa* (6a), a “land-stepper” or “Wanderer (through the land)” (DOE). This word defines the Wanderer by the activity he performs, a movement through space, though this movement is not just through the space of the landscape, but also, I suggest, through the space of himself, for the manifestation of the self in the conceptual metaphors we have seen occurs in a conceptual space. The DOE definition of the compound obscures the primary sense of the first element, *eard-*, which is a “dwelling place” (DOE 1), a “home” (1.b), or even a “state” (5). Given the mental activity we have already seen and are about to examine more closely, the subject of the poem is a Wanderer of the spaces of the self, of human mental existence. The opening of *The Wanderer* thus prepares us to follow an examination of the shape of the Anglo-Saxon mind and being, as experienced and revealed through the trauma of the speaker’s isolation.⁷⁴

The section of the poem examined at the start of this chapter left us with the two mind models—the mind-container and the mind-body. After the poem alerts us to the Wanderer’s solitary state and his characteristic activity of wandering some space, the

⁷⁴ For a different approach to the poem’s affective expression, see Lori Garner, who argues that “sorrow in the elegies is more explicitly about architectural structures” (164).

poem reports the Wanderer's direct thoughts on his misery and his attempts to control himself with gnomic wisdom (8-33). This section includes the monologue rich in mind language which I have already examined (9b-21). To review, though, the Wanderer speaks of not being able to show his mind ("modsefan") to anyone living, then utters some wisdom about how good it is for a nobleman ("eorle") to bind fast his mind ("ferðlocan") and control it ("hordcofan"), whatever he thinks ("hycge") about. Next, his weary mind ("mod") cannot withstand fate, nor can his mind ("hyge") help. He comments that those eager for justice must bind bad thoughts in the chest ("breostcofan"), therefore he will bind his mind ("modsefan") with fetters. The distinction is between the mind as an enclosed container to be shut and kept tight, and the mind which behaves like a body capable of standing (or failing to) and supporting.⁷⁵ But this seemingly clear-cut distinction is complicated by language in the rest of the poem. While there are instances that conform to this bipartite model,⁷⁶ other cases show a blending of the conceptions for the mind, resulting in some apparently paradoxical behavior. An early example of this mind confusion occurs after the long passage quoted earlier, when the speaker states, "ic modsefan minne sceolde ... feterum sælan" ["I had to bind my mind with fetters"] (19-21). Usually the act of binding the mind occurs with one of the spatial terms for mind, those depicting a bound enclosure. In this case, though, the

⁷⁵ Perhaps there is another mind, the one he fears to reveal to anyone, which could be understood as an object—the contents of the mind-container, probably emotions and thoughts related to the pain of his exile.

⁷⁶ The mind again seems to be the contents of its enclosed space when the Wanderer wants to find a new lord, "þone þe in meoduhealle minne myne wise" ["who in the mead-hall might know my mind"] (27). This example depends on an emendation of the manuscript reading, "mine wise," originally suggested by Dunning-Bliss. Similarly, a worthy man must never too quickly "of his breostum acypan" ["reveal from his breast"] (113a). The mind is again an enclosure: "ferðloca freorig" ["cold spirit-locker"] (33a), "hreþra gehygd" ["thoughts of the breast"] (72a), and perhaps "Swa cwæð snottor on mode" ["so spoke the wise one in his mind"] (111a).

abstract and usually embodied *modsefa* receives the binding. This expression suggests the overlap of the two models, or even a conceptual blend. The mind-body receives the action of binding usually associated with keeping the mind-container closed.

This blending of mind models is especially prominent in the middle of the poem as the Wanderer's thoughts are taken up with memory (34-62a). This memorial sequence begins as "gemon he selesecgas ond sincpege" ["he remembers hall men and accepting treasure"] (34). The act of memory is first communicated with a simple, direct verb, and thus expresses no metaphorical depth—he simply remembers these people and this activity. But a few lines later a scene develops *in* his mind, as the speaker comments that "þinceð him on **mode** þæt he his mondryhten / clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge / honda ond heafod" ["it seems in his **mind** that he embraces and kisses his lord, lays his hands and head on his knee"] (41a-43a). This depiction of the Wanderer's fantasy treats the mind (*mod*) as a space in which the scene described takes place. This is the mind-container and its contents are the whole scene of intimate social interaction. The Wanderer then wakes to see a wintry scene before him, in a contrast to the comfort of the memory. His mind, though, remains engaged in the act of memory: "sorg bið geniwad, / þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð" ["sorrow is renewed, when his mind turns through memory of kin"] (50b-51b). What kind of activity is this "turning through" exactly? The DOE devotes a sub-sense to this line from *The Wanderer*: "figurative, of the mind / imagination: to rove through, visit every part of (its memory)" (1.a). The actions of visiting and roving are those of a body in a space, but the space is the bound area of the mind. The two conceptions blend here in a surprisingly coherent way, one embedded in the other as the mind-body of the Wanderer works within his mind-container. The *mod*

behaves like a body which is capable of traversing a space as indicated by the verb *geondhweorfan*, which is usually associated with traveling. The strange thing is that it travels through itself. The word *gemynd*, commonly translated as “memory” as I have just done, is one of those many terms that can just simply mean “mind.” So the mind can be said to travel the space of the mind, in which his kin are located in memory. This is a way to express the memory of the kin he misses, and, according to Stacy Klein, his “[m]emorialization of the heroic world allows him to lay it to rest” (120). It is also a very claustrophobic image as he is stuck in his mind even as it travels. This is just the predicament of the Wanderer himself—stuck in his mind as he roams the world.⁷⁷

The companions in his mind disappear, however: “swimmað eft on weg / fleotendra ferð” [“the spirit of floating ones swim back away”] (53b-54a). The usage of the mind-word in this passage, *ferhþ*, is not clear, as the editors of the DOE point out, though they do give “spirit” as its sense here. It seems that the imagined companions in the Wanderer’s mind have the status of spirit while in the mind. But would it make any sense to retain a sense of “mind” for these floating ones? Perhaps if we consider the memorial contents of the Wanderer’s mind to *be* his mind, following a mind-as-object conception, and if we remember that an Anglo-Saxon mind is not a unified, but multiform entity, then to lose a memory is, in a way, to lose his mind. The Wanderer’s mind leaves his mind as the memory fades, but it leaves in a very physical sense that again echoes his own literal wanderings. Of course, swimming away implies water, which recalls the hydraulic model of the mind. If thoughts and emotions are fluid in a

⁷⁷ Even as Klein distinguishes between active male exile and enclosed female exile, she admits that, though the wanderer trudges on, there seems to be little if any literal movement in the poem (119).

container, these spirits swimming away could be a way of saying they are expelled in an excited mental state of anguish.

A final blend of mind models, and a clear depiction of a mind leaving the body, occurs when the Wanderer discusses these memories, expounding that

Cearo bið geniwad

þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe

ofer waþema gebind werigne **sefan**.

Forþon ic **geþencan** ne mæg geond þas woruld

for hwan **modsefa** min ne gesweorce,

þonne ic eorla lif eal **geondþence**,

hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,

modge maguþegnas. (55b-62a)

[Care is renewed for him who must very often send a weary **mind** over the binding of waves. Therefore I may not **think** through this world why my **mind** does not darken when I completely **think through** the life of men, how they quickly gave up the floor, **brave** young thanes.]

The report of sending a mind over the waves is conceit reminiscent of *The Seafarer*, and one which follows logically from the idea of the mind as a component of the self that behaves like an animate body. Rather than thinking of thoughts or memories as objects contained within the mind, as the mind-container conception would have it, the mind-body travels out into the world to achieve the connection between mind and world that signifies the state or process of recollection. The two verbs for thinking in this passage also express this particular kind of thought. Both instances of some form of the verb

þencan involve the preposition or prefix *geond*, which prototypically expresses the relationship “throughout.” In the phrase “geond þas woruld” (58b), the thinking is given the spatial range of the whole world, presumably the scope of all the speaker’s memories and experiences. Something similar is happening in the phrase “þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence” (60). Even if this thought is not restricted to memory, but instead an imaginative construction of the life of men (conceived of as a corporate, timeless whole), the thinking occurs spatially *through* its object, as a place which the mind travels to.

The Wanderer’s mind is simultaneously something that travels freely through memory and imagination, but also something that contains and binds these scenes, along with emotion and thought. Activity of the mind—thinking or feeling—is expressed the fulfillment of the nature of the metaphor used to express it—full of contents for the mind-container, and movement for the mind-body. The apparent paradox implied by a mind being at once a body capable of movement and a container capable of being closed up demonstrates two things. One is the behavior of metaphorical concepts, which need not be completely coherent as they each just pick out particular aspects of the concept without expressing a unified whole. This merely confirms the theory of metaphor and indeed language developed by Lakoff and Johnson. But the second tells us something about this particular poem. The tension involved by expressing the mind in two apparently contradictory manners is precisely the tension felt by the subject of *The Wanderer*. I read the poem as an expression or exploration of a personal psychology in trauma.

The cause of the trauma is isolation. This is clear not only through the elegiac conventions saturating the poem, but also by the breakdown of mind we have seen. One

reason that the different minds which make up the Wanderer's psyche behave in ways inconsistent and at odds with one another is as a result of having no one to interact with socially, so instead he interacts with himself. But in this interaction, each type of mind conceptualization he expresses, fails in its proper functioning. The speaker's inner struggle is cast in such a way that negates or nullifies the metaphorical manifestations of his mind. If the mind is a physical space, an enclosure, or a container, that space is closed and bound so as to stop any communication between inside and outside. If the mind is an object to possess, it is hidden away and not shown off. If the mind is a body, it is impotent, weary, and unable to act to provide buttressing support, but rather flies away in escape. The Wanderer's mind is a space that cannot be entered, an object that cannot be seen, and a body that cannot move. Isolation forecloses the functioning of a mind. A telling reiteration of this problem occurs when the speaker explains that he is possessed by exile paths, not wound gold, by "ferðloca freorig" ["frozen mind-locker"] (33a), not earth's splendor. This mind is, of course, frozen because the Wanderer occupies a wintry climate, but also frozen in its immobility. An object like a door that is frozen shut cannot be manipulated or altered without breaking it. Such is the Wanderer's mind, at least in one aspect. To say that he is possessed by his frozen, immobile mind (most evidently an enclosure) is to assert that he is in thrall to his paralyzed mind. Making his failure even more acute, he expresses a desire for the remedy required to resolve his scattered being. He yearns for someone else, a new lord to take him in and comfort him: "þone þe in meoduhealle minne myne wisse" ["him who in the mead-hall might know my mind"] (27).⁷⁸ For a new lord to be able to know the Wanderer's mind, it must not be concealed

⁷⁸ This line contains an emendation that should be commented on. It reads "mine wisse" in the manuscript,

as a closed space, hidden object, and enervated body. The poem suggests that only social interaction allows a mind to be fully realized in all of its metaphorical complexity.⁷⁹

The failure of mind is given one last expression as the mind-body of memory noted above (56-57) leaves the mind-container and moves into the world. This act, reminiscent of *The Seafarer's* ranging mind, breaks the stalemate between two functions of the Wanderer's mind, as it is animated, though weary. His mind is now no longer expressed in terms of the frustration of metaphorical capabilities. The movement of the mind-body seems to have won out over the restraint of the mind-container. In the competing experiences of the Wanderer's mental trauma—manic activity and paralytic stability—the former overpowers the latter. What we have just seen in the bursting out of mind-body from mind-container, though, is a final failure of the mind. The uneasy stasis achieved by the shutting down of mental capabilities does not last—energy wins out as the mind leaves the mind, in a compelling image of mental trauma.

This damage is not, however, the last word in the poem—it only marks the half-way point. And there is another aspect of the self that we have not yet considered. We have seen the Wanderer (or a gnomic proxy) express a fear of revealing his mind (9b-11a), a desire to bind his mind (13-14, 18, 21a), and the action of sending his mind away (56a-57b). This kind of expression raises the question of who or what is performing those actions on the mind. In the language of the poem, it is the “ic” of the first-person speaker

but I follow the emendation in Muir's edition (as I do for most of the poem), which in turn follows that of Dunning and Bliss. To retain the manuscript reading results in a translation along the lines of “might know mine,” with the object of possession implied to be “people” or even “self” or “concerns.” I prefer the addition of “minne” and emendation of “mine” to “myne” because it is consistent with the protective attitude toward and prevalent mention of the mind in the poem. (I wonder if “mine” could even be a contraction of the two terms.)

⁷⁹ As Melanie Heyworth argues, the nostalgia of the elegiac poems like *The Wanderer* are less a personal feeling and more social in their implications.

(10a, 19a) and the “he” of the *eorl* the Wanderer imagines and wants to emulate (12a, 13a). But what aspect of the self is in control, either of himself or this *eorl*, and able to (at least attempt to) exert power over the wild nature of the mental activity and even the parts of the body where feelings and thought occur? Nothing suggested by the scholars reviewed above would seem to clearly explain this. It would not be the mind, as that is the object of the intentional actions. It would not be the flesh, as that is just the unthinking part of the body. It is unlikely to be the life-force as that personal component is very poorly developed in terms of metaphorical attributes (it is noted only in its absence to signify death). It could be the soul, which the mind is a component of in the Augustinian model, but there is no lexical evidence in the poem supporting this idea. The four-part schema of body-mind-soul-life lacks a controlling subject position.

Perhaps we have evidence here of another division in a person, one which divides him into the two components that Lakoff and Johnson name the Subject and the Self. The Subject is the conscious part of us that exercises reason, will and judgment (*Philosophy* 269) and it behaves metaphorically as a person. The Self (really multiple selves) comprises everything else inside of us, emotions, drives, etc. This Self can be metaphorically conceived of as either another person, an object, or a location (269). In Old English the Self includes those aspects of a person which are in an object relation to the Subject—Lockett’s body, mind, soul, and life-force. In *The Wanderer* we see the Subject represented in the grammatical subjects of the speaker (the “ic”) and the *eorl* he should behave like (the “he”). And we see the Selves manifested in all the mind words I have discussed; they operate sometimes as bodies, sometimes as spaces, and perhaps sometimes as objects. The struggle of the Wanderer is to keep himself, his Subject, in

control of his various expressive and energetic Selves, which we have seen to be manifested in several metaphorical reflexes of the mind. What is interesting is that he talks about the Subject in a distancing kind of way, using the *eorl*, a lordly nobleman, as a kind of cultural template for proper behavior (the Wanderer cannot escape other people even when alone). But it is the other parts of the Wanderer's being, the Selves, that seem to have the upper hand. He has to perform this distancing appeal to the figure of a cultural norm. Exploring these metaphorical conceptions of the Wanderer's conflicted internal life reveals that his anguish is articulated as a struggle for control of a Subject over Selves, which themselves are not unified, but rather pull in different directions.

The Subject of *The Wanderer* expresses himself as in a struggle with aspects of his Self. In doing so, he appeals to cultural wisdom in maxims which explain the character of a hypothetical *eorl*. This *eorl* seems to have no such struggle, but remains unified. The abstract, gnomic *eorl* which the Wanderer appeals to in an attempt to regulate his behavior is the beginning of the solution to the problem of minds or the control of the Subject over the Selves. Wisdom takes the place of interlocutor as the poem proceeds to its consoling second half. The whole poem is a dramatization of the Wanderer's attempts to exhibit self-control to become the lordly, virtuous man, and this self-control is articulated by the constriction or restriction of his spirit or thoughts or feelings, at once valuable and dangerous. This is the force of the stoic maxims the Wanderer repeats to himself. He must not merely remain silent, rather he must take dynamic action to secure the thoughts within himself. For the Wanderer's internal life to make sense, and for him to remain heroic, he must engage with the wisdom of tradition and become the ideal *eorl*. To be the good warrior he urges himself to be, the Wanderer

must not let the energetic mind, embodied by the *modsefa*, escape, or it might lead to something dangerous (like poetry, for what is the poem itself, if not the expression of the very energy the Wanderer struggles to keep contained?).⁸⁰ But, ironically, this escape is what leads to the transformation. Only when the mind-body leaves the mind-container, is the speaker capable of becoming, not just the *eorl*, but wisdom itself as he spends the rest of the poem rehearsing such wisdom.

At first, the Wanderer cannot understand why he is still functioning. Immediately after the bursting out of the mind-body from the mind-container, the poem makes its transition to a more contemplative mood as the Wanderer utters several lines of confusion that present a new image of the mind:

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld

for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce,

þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence.

hu hi færlíce flet ofgeafon,

modge maguþegnas. (58-62a)

[Therefore I cannot think through this world why my mind does not
darken when I completely think through the life of men, how they gave up
the floor, brave young thanes.]

The most interesting part of this passage is the mind's apparent ability to darken. The darkening could be a result of the mind-body ranging too far out of sight, or the mind-container sealing out light. The former seems more appropriate considering the action

⁸⁰ Melissa Wolfe notes the contradiction between the virtue of reticence and the expression of the poem, arguing that the poet carefully juxtaposes perspectives to achieve both: "This shifting of perspectives both gives him the credibility he needs to deliver his message and allows the audience to find themselves within his loss and his wisdom, and through that, within his hope at the end" (565).

just accomplished by the mind breaking out of the body. One issue here is the relationship of the prepositional phrase “geond þas woruld.” Does it apply to the first act of thinking (wondering why), the darkening of the mind, or even the second act of thinking (about the life of men)? Proximity supports the first possibility—no matter where he is in the world he is unable to think. The failure of the metaphorical capabilities of the mind, which I have just demonstrated, would seem to be summed up in this statement. Perhaps the line should not even be attached to those that follow, as most modern editors punctuate it, but instead follow from the lines just before about sending the weary mind over the waves. It could be an independent clause punctuating the many problems of mental activity recounted in the whole first half of the poem—the Wanderer is just unable to think properly, crucially in *this* world.

So why does the mind *not* darken? This seems to be a comment on the resiliency and durable redundancy of the Anglo-Saxon mind. Even when the mind-body has departed in its flight of memory and desire, the whole self remains functional, especially when wisdom and thoughts can be continually generated inside the mind. There is no darkness because there is no emptiness in the mind after all. A relentless series of maxims follow the Wanderer’s realization that his mind is not dark—evidence of this light, which likely reflects metaphors like LIGHT IS KNOWING or LIGHT IS SEEING. Thus the Wanderer’s light suggests that he does possess wisdom or divine inspiration. The maxims he recounts take the form of acceptance of the transience of this world (62b-63), the realization that one must live for a while to understand this (64-65a), and the properly moderate behavior of men living in that kind of a world (65b-73). The rest of the poem generally rehearses these themes until it concludes with a hypermetric coda of detached reflection:

Swa cwæð snottor on mode — gesæt him sundor æt rune.
 Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ, ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene
 beorn of his breostum acyþan, nemþe he ær þa bote cunne,
 eorl mid elne gefremman. Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
 frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð. (111-
 115)

[So said the wise man in his mind; he sat apart in contemplation. Worthy
 is he who keeps his faith, never must his anger be too hasty, which a man
 shows from his breast, unless he knows how to make the remedy
 beforehand, a man with courage. Well is it for him who seeks mercy,
 comfort from the father in heaven, where for us all permanence stands.]

In its two references to the mind, this final passage is more settled in its presentation of mental activity than the early parts of his poem. The locative phrase “on mode” (111) can refer to one wise in his mind who speaks, or to a wise one speaking in his mind. In the first case wisdom is located in the mind, and in the second case, the mind is the place for speech (linguistic thought)—either way it is a container. But there is no evidence that the container is still bound or must be sealed tightly. The man sits apart in thought, and is thus still alone, but there is no indication that this solitude is problematic. Once he has achieved his spiritual wisdom, the Wanderer (assuming he is the one now speaking) is no longer mentally conflicted. He can hold wisdom in his mind-container and speak it (either inside or outside). The following lines imply that he is one who has enough wisdom to be able to open his mind and reveal his thoughts and feelings (from the *breost*). It is not that thoughts and feelings are inherently bad, but that one must contain enough in his mind so

that their release does not deplete it and leave it dark.⁸¹ The outflow of mind must be matched with a properly full condition of mind.⁸²

Alice Sheppard has noted⁸³ that the Wanderer does not actually follow the advice of the wisdom he recites, so it is more important to read the wisdom in the poem as process than as content. Rather, with emphasis on the action of thinking thoroughly (*geond*), Sheppard contends that the poem shows how it is this process which makes the *anhaga* become the *snottor on mode*. Sheppard explains that the poem is part of the tradition of wisdom and functions as a *gyd*, an obscure enigma to be deciphered (thinking beyond)—being able to recite proverbs, which the speaker does in very direct ways in the second half of the poem (as opposed to the indirect manner used in the first half) is crucial to ending his misery. The effect of wisdom is to move the Wanderer from the personal to the general. It does not matter so much what this wisdom is, as long as it represents the thoughts of his culture, and therefore stands in place of that culture to counteract the physical isolation. The Wanderer is healed, not through heeding good advice, but for having some in the first place. I think, therefore, that Susan Irvine is not quite right when she argues that the poem shows the inadequacy of words.⁸⁴ She argues

⁸¹ *Maxims I* echoes this kind of healthy mind that is involved with the open exchange of wisdom (1-4a). The poem opens with a direct address to the reader demanding an open mind which can not only receive the wisdom of the poem, but must also share his own thoughts with the poem. Both the poem and the audience are thought of as containers to be filled and the nature of wisdom is to fill such a container. There is a reciprocal relationship between the wisdom the poem contains and the audience as the destination for the wisdom.

⁸² Scott Gwara (“*Forht and Fægen* in *The Wanderer* and Related Literary Contexts of Anglo-Saxon Warrior Wisdom”) puts this another way, I think, when he argues that the Wanderer finds the wisdom of balancing action and inaction with “right action” (286). Right action in my analysis is the state of mind which balances desperate expression with wisdom.

⁸³ In “A Word to the Wise: Thinking, Knowledge and Wisdom in *The Wanderer*.”

⁸⁴ In “Speaking One’s Mind in *The Wanderer*.”

that this claim parallels the theme of transience in the poem, but I have just shown how crucial possessing the right words is for the Wanderer's well-being. Only those words can restore his mind to its proper metaphorical functioning. So I agree, rather, with Scott Gwara, who finds a more Germanic, heroic message in the wisdom of the poem (286). It is the very act of participating in wisdom that calms the Wanderer, rather than any specific quality of these maxims.

As an elegy that treats the condition of exile, *The Wanderer* particularly explores the traumatic effects of isolation and misery on the mind, as well as the remedy for such a condition. Positioned away from all other people, the Wanderer becomes the site for internal communication between the various aspects of his mind. In such a dialogue these competing models for the mind shut down and lose their ability to function. Finally, the mind-body, in an act of longing, breaks through the confines of the mind-container. At this point the Wanderer can focus on the wisdom he retains to achieve a peaceful, stable, and well-functioning mind, much like the *fæstnung* of heaven the final lines of the poem uphold. This internal drama is played out in the spatial terms of the landscape inhabited by bodies both contained and wandering. The pain of exile is the pain of individuality, and this independence creates a war among or suppression of the Selves that can only be resolved with internalized reference to the wisdom of the culture the Wanderer is cut off from.

Conclusion: The Shape of the Anglo-Saxon Self

It remains to be answered, then, what exactly the Anglo-Saxon sense of selfhood is, but that is no easy task for the simple reason that there is no consistent answer. What can be said is that Old English poetry expresses a self more complicated than the bipartite

soul and body division common to medieval Christian theology. And it is more than the early Christian tripartite division of body, soul, and spirit.⁸⁵ Even Lockett's four-part scheme of body, soul, mind, and life is not sufficient for explaining the workings of the self in Old English poetry. I have shown that each of these four parts can behave in various and not entirely consistent ways. The body, while often a merely material aspect of being, can in fact be endowed with characteristics more commonly found with the mind or the soul, as we saw in the *Soul and Body* poems when the body itself is implied to be capable of rational thought and activities. The soul is a rational being, but often just signifies the part of the self which survives death. The mind is not the Augustinian system of memory, will, and intelligence, but instead operates with two primary metaphorical expressions, as an animate body and as an enclosing container, sometimes part of the body (Lockett's "thinking flesh"), sometimes as more of a transcendent entity. The life, a less developed aspect of the self, is a force whose presence indicates that a person is alive. But even this more nuanced version of Lockett's self does not account for the Subject, as opposed to the Self. Rather than calling this Subject a fifth part of a person, I think that it exists among above the parts of the self. That is, it is like a free-floating attribute that can be affixed to one part of the self. The Subject can be identified with the soul, with the mind, or even with the contents of the mind. *The Wanderer*, I think, demonstrates this last possibility with the cultural wisdom that guides speaker's thoughts and words. The self in Old English poetry is not simple, nor, I suspect, does this

⁸⁵ See Lockett (17) for a brief review of this tradition which persisted into the Middle Ages, albeit in a limited way.

brief study exhaust all the possible characterizations and behaviors of the multiple parts of Anglo-Saxon self.

CHAPTER III

DEATH AND LIFE

Introduction: *Beowulf*

After Beowulf's defeat of Grendel's mother, Hrothgar moderates the ensuing celebration with some sobering advice for the hero. In what has come to be known as "Hrothgar's Sermon," the leader of the Danes cautions Beowulf against pride, reminding the warrior that his might will not last in this world forever:

eft sona bið

þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð,

oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,

oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht,

oððe atol ylðo; oððe eagenas bearhtm

forsiteð ond forsworceð; semninga bið

þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð. (1762b-68)

[Soon after it will be that poison or sword deprives you of your strength, or fire's grasp, or flood's surge, or sword's grip, or spear's flight, or horrible old age; or brightness of eyes fail and darken; it will suddenly be that death overpowers you, warrior.]

Hrothgar creates a list of many different ways for Beowulf to anticipate his death coming to him; these range from the violence of sword and spear, to natural world dangers of flood and fire, to the inevitable effects of aging. The important message is that, however it may happen, Beowulf will die. Death is inescapable, a fact that Old English poetry

reminds us of often. This kind of catalog of deaths in *Beowulf*⁸⁶ is not unique in Old English literature⁸⁷—in fact, one whole poem, *The Fortunes of Men*, is almost entirely devoted to just such a list.⁸⁸ But the varying causes of death presented in these lists is only one way that the Anglo-Saxons demonstrated their understanding of death. In addition to this conscious, overt analysis, which counts the physical, real-world causes of death, the language itself reveals a deeper understanding of death in the culture. Through careful examination of the verbs for dying and the nouns and phrases for death, one can discern a system of cognitive metaphor, often spatially based, that expresses the Anglo-Saxons' conception of death.

It is not much of an overstatement to claim that death was an obsession in medieval life. With conditions far less favorable to survival than they are now, with *memento mori* a common feature of church and ritual, with pilgrimage to shrines a popular activity, with eschatological hopes and fears rampant, and with literature devoted to the violent deaths of heroes and the blessed deaths of martyrs, death was a part of life.⁸⁹ But, as an abstract concept without physical form, death is ripe for conceptual

⁸⁶ *Beowulf* exists in a unique copy in the Nowell Codex, along with a homily on Saint Christopher, *Wonders of the East*, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, and *Judith*. *Beowulf*'s date of composition is uncertain (more precisely than the range from 600 and 1000), and has been a matter of great debate. See Klaeber's 4th edition (clxii-clxxx) for a review of this controversy.

⁸⁷ Nor is such a catalogue unique to Old English literature: the editors of Klaeber's 4th edition of *Beowulf* note that these death catalogs "recall[] passages in classical and ecclesiastical literature" (216).

⁸⁸ *Maxims I* and *Maxims II* also offer lists of manners of death.

⁸⁹ For treatments of the medieval ideas of and attitudes toward death, see T. S. R. Boase's *Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance*, which covers representations of death throughout the Middle Ages, Philippe Ariès's *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1-24), which covers the rituals involved with death in the early Middle Ages, Patrick J. Geary's *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, which focuses on hagiography and considers the ways the dead were present to medieval people, and Paul Binski's *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*, whose comprehensive study covers medieval death from rites to relics, from bodies to churches, from art to the afterlife.

metaphorical articulation. Old English poetry is especially metaphorical in its expression of the closely related concepts of death and life. And, in keeping with the generally gloomy tone of Old English poetry, most of the expressions that reveal understanding of both life and death refer directly to death.⁹⁰ Life and death, as states, require physical deployment in conceptual space for their operation to be understood. The purpose of this chapter is to map out the varied conceptual relationships between the source and target domains for death (and life, where appropriate), based on their linguistic expression, and to show how the poetry takes advantage of such metaphors to develop further claims about particular experiences of life and death. Some of the Old English metaphors for death are familiar, but some less so. The conceptual metaphors for death in Old English can be classified into several categories (most dependent on some kind of spatial placement or orientation), which I will outline here first before demonstrating their presence, workings, and effects in particular Old English poems. I discern three major categories which cover most metaphors for death (and life).

DEATH IS DEPARTURE: This first metaphor is probably the most common in Old English literature; it still remains current today in expressions like “he’s passed away,” “she’s no longer with us,” or “he has left us.” The idea of death being the movement to somewhere else could derive from the fact a body, once dead, must be moved and taken away to somewhere else.⁹¹ Additionally, when someone dies, they are no longer present in the life experiences of those who knew them; therefore, it makes sense to think that the

⁹⁰ Hence the title of this chapter reversing the expected order of the pairing in modern parlance: from “life and death” to “death and life.”

⁹¹ Douglas Davies explains, “One common element within the history of death is the fact that actual corpses need removal; the dead demand some attention and treatment.” (48)

dead people must *be* somewhere else—perhaps away travelling or moved to a different home. These are the physical bases for the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE. This metaphor derives from a generic-level metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS. Life, a state, is considered to be a place defined by its immediate proximity, both spatial and temporal. To be alive is to be here, in this place, now. Consequently, to die is to leave or depart, to *not* be here. To not be here any longer, one must leave, hence DEATH IS DEPARTURE.⁹² The place to which the victim of death travels is variously characterized in Old English literature: from an undefined “away,” to a hostile wasteland, to the kingdom of heaven. Closely related is the concept of life as a journey, whose destination, therefore, is death (however specifically conceived). Old English tends to be more deliberate in these expression than similar ones in Modern English, the departure being consciously willed action.

DEATH IS DOWN: In addition to these obviously metaphorical ways to describe death, there are some more grounded in the physical experience of dying. One such conception is related to the position of a body, specifically falling or lying down. In falling there is a strong correlation, but of course no necessary causation, between dying and falling down. The metaphor finds a physical basis in the position of a body in death. When human beings are healthy and alive, they are capable of standing under their own power, but if they suddenly die, they would fall down. Dead bodies remain in a lying position for they are unable to rise through their own power. Of course, there are other reasons than death that one might fall down or be lying down, but the metaphorical

⁹² See Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, chapter 11 for details on the structure of events, including existence (especially 205-206).

system structures itself on these prototypical positions of the body in life or death. Grounded in this correlation, falling communicates dying, and being fallen death.⁹³ I suspect that this idea, in concert with other ways of discussing death as lying and resting, all obtain meaning as contradictions to a metaphor for life—LIFE IS STANDING UPRIGHT. Sleep, with its lying position, is a related way of discussing death and yields another metaphor: DEATH IS SLEEP.

DEATH IS FRACTURING OF SELF: When I say fracturing, I am not speaking here of a physical dismemberment of the body, but a conceptual one. As we saw in Chapter II, the Anglo-Saxon self is made up of a complex of components, each with its own specific functioning. One way to represent death is through the dissolution of these parts of the self. Two of the relations between aspects of the self discussed in that chapter signify death. First is the loss of the life-force, thought of as a possession. This reflex of the conceptual metaphor, also still with us today, depends on another metaphor that can take a couple of different forms. Generally we think of life as a tangible, physical thing, leading to a metaphor LIFE IS AN OBJECT. Since the physical possession of this object signifies being alive, we have LIFE IS A POSSESSION. To lose this possession life, therefore, is to die. These metaphors exist because of the difficulty in discussing abstract qualities belonging to a person or thing. Even now I cannot discuss the idea of possessing a quality without using words like *belong* and *possess*. To possess the object life is to live,⁹⁴ while to release the object life is to die. The previous chapter explained the nature of the object of life as more of a force than a physical object, though, in expressions of death, it is

⁹³ This metaphor lives on today in expressions like “fallen soldiers.”

⁹⁴ The DOE recognizes that life is often treated as a possession. See the entries for *ealdor* (1.c) and *feorh* (1.c).

difficult to perceive a difference. The other way the self fractures in death is through the separation of body and soul. Related to both of the previous metaphors, one involving movement and the other possession, is one that appears frequently and specifically enough to merit its own category. Death is not just leaving this place for another (whether it is the subject or the soul departing), nor is it just losing some object. Death is also an internal separation, a splitting of soul or life from body.

These three conceptual categories for death each depend upon some kind of spatial operation to communicate the condition: the dead person either moves away, moves down, or splits internally. All three are also present in some form in Modern English, but two factors set Old English apart. One is the frequency of these manners of expression for death relative to simple, direct verbs meaning “to die.” In fact, the verb *die* did not even enter into the record of the language until the Middle English period (OED v.1). Other verbs, such as *sweltan* and *steorfan*, which have since narrowed in meaning, were used to mean “to die” in Old English. But, as we shall see, they appear much less often than the metaphorical expressions covered here.

The second way death in Old English differs from that of Modern English is the degree of agency ascribed to the dying person. Ordinarily death is something that happens more than something one does; but metaphor allows a transformation of death from an event, something that just occurs without a direct cause from an intentional agent, to an action, which is defined as the result of an agent.⁹⁵ This meaning is made possible by a generic-level metaphor that is quite common across English—EVENTS ARE

⁹⁵ The EVENTS ARE ACTIONS metaphor lies behind many modern metaphors for death, from the personified Grim Reaper to Monty Python’s famous “pushing up the daisies” line.

ACTIONS. If DEATH IS AN ACTION, then it requires an agent. Thus death is something that someone does, and, most importantly for the Anglo-Saxons, something that someone *chooses* to do. Figures in Old English literature can be empowered by choosing to die, rather than merely suffering the fate passively. Additionally, the agency of death as an action can be transferred from the one dying (and the literal killer, of course) to an abstract personification. Death itself can come and kill its victim.⁹⁶

One final way of talking about death in Old English is worth mentioning. Often, the cause of death stands in for the event of death. There are many violent instruments of death in Old English poetry—swords, spears, and teeth all cut, pierce, or rend a body apart to kill a man. It may be too much to call these metaphors, as they are literal descriptions of how someone dies. But expressions of these actions are often used to communicate death. This tendency calls attention to the violence involved in death, in opposition to metaphors which focus on other, less-violent aspects of dying, like resting or leaving.

Each of the concepts just outlined speaks to a different aspect of death, which, as an abstract concept, requires the sum of many such angles in order for one to obtain as complete an understanding of the concept as possible. Poets thus have a range of conceptions and metaphors from which to choose to describe a death. Many deaths in Old English literature are expressed with more than one metaphor, revealing the Anglo-Saxon propensity to meditate on an event and express it from several different perspectives. But, as I will argue in the rest of the chapter, these death metaphors are not always used

⁹⁶ See Lakoff and Turner (7-24) and Fauconnier and Turner (291-295) for detailed discussions of death personification.

arbitrarily, but rather can be motivated by the kind of death occurring or the kind of person dying. Certain metaphors cluster strongly in certain texts or with certain subjects. The way this happens guides an audience's response to a particular death and its evaluation of the particular character. It could, in fact, be another way to mark genre, as certain metaphors appear more often in certain kinds of texts. To proceed with this chapter, I will focus on each of the categories of death metaphor listed above, one at a time, with a specific poem that exploits that metaphor in an especially strong or interesting way. First, *The Fortunes of Men* will serve to demonstrate the spatial notion of death (with some assistance from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) as the most neutral way of communicating death. Next, *The Fates of the Apostles* shows what a poet can do with the death as departure, developing destinations. *Beowulf* relies most heavily on the idea of death as the loss of the possession life, but also uses the violence of death quite often. Then several texts employ the idea of death as a choice and death as separation at key moments. Battle poetry like *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Battle of Brunanburh* employ a heavy use of the DEATH IS DOWN metaphor. I conclude the chapter with a look at what a metaphorical analysis of death can do to help answer the old question of whether the speaker in *The Wife's Lament* is actually dead.

Departing for Death: *The Fortunes of Men*

The Fortunes of Men,⁹⁷ a 98-line poem appearing only in the Exeter Book,⁹⁸ is, as I have mentioned, essentially a catalog⁹⁹ of the numerous ways one can perish; as such, it

⁹⁷ The poem is also known as *The Fates of Men* and *The Fates of Mortals*.

⁹⁸ This tenth-century collection contains a miscellany of poems, mostly focused on a theme of appropriate conduct for the Christian life (see Muir 16-25 for a discussion of this and other views). The poem has no known Latin original (Fulk and Cain 175). Though it was compiled in the tenth century, its contents likely derive from an earlier oral tradition.

exhibits a wide range of metaphorical bases for understanding death. The poem opens with a brief story of how men and women bring a child from birth to maturity, commenting, however, that only God knows what will become of this child. After a list of the misfortunes someone might encounter in life, the poem concludes with a list of skills God bestows on people,¹⁰⁰ and an exhortation that we thank God for these gifts.¹⁰¹ It is the thirteen misfortunes, each introduced by a form of *sum* [“one”], that interest me here.¹⁰² Three of these fates do not clearly result in death, but the others offer a variety of deaths that one could experience in everyday life. These are not exclusively the deaths of the warrior aristocracy,¹⁰³ though this class certainly often suffers them elsewhere in Old English poetry. But there are no extended elaborations of the violent deaths of battle which we will soon see in other poems like *The Battle of Maldon* and *Beowulf*. The deaths in *The Fortunes of Men* are, however, surprisingly consistent in their metaphorical deployment, most based on some version of the spatial conception for death that I have subsumed under the DEATH IS DEPARTURE conceptual metaphor. This is the most neutral structural metaphor for death in the literature. In *The Fortunes of Men*, the predominance of this metaphor has the effect of generality (as if Old English wisdom poetry needed

⁹⁹ Karen Swenson best defines its identity as a catalog poem: “The poem’s most obvious structural attribute is its form as a list, a formal organizational principle which suggests a reading of the poem in terms of the generic category *pula*, or ‘Catalogue’” (125).

¹⁰⁰ This section of the poem is similar to another poem from the Exeter Book, *The Gifts of Men*.

¹⁰¹ Nicholas Howe argues that the poem is fundamentally didactic: “The movement in the poem then is not simply a means of persuading one that the way of God is best; it also teaches the passage by which many have found their way to God” (*Old English Catalogue Poems* 116).

¹⁰² Howe also warns of modern interest in this part of the poem: “these stories of disorder and suffering which attract us, whose sensibilities have been shaped by the culture of modernism, were antithetical to the poet” (*Old English Catalogue Poems* 131). My project is, of course, informed by the interests of my time, so I do not apologize for this focus.

¹⁰³ As implied by critics like Neil Isaacs (365-366).

more of that) and ordinariness, conveying a comprehensive and quotidian account of death for an Anglo-Saxon audience.

The poem introduces its catalog of deaths by noting that the end may come woefully to a youth after leaving the security of family. The term used for this end is *endestæf* (11a), which the DOE defines as “end, conclusion (mainly ref. to the end of life).”¹⁰⁴ The first death such a youth might encounter is as food for the wolf: “sceal hine wulf etan, / har hæðstapa; hinsip þonne / modor bimurneð [“the wolf must eat him, grey heath-stepper; his mother then mourns his journey away”] (12b-14a). At first glance there is nothing metaphorical about this death—the wolf just eats the man.¹⁰⁵ But in the clause about his mother, she may not just mourn his being eaten, but also his *hinsip* [“journey away”]. This youth’s death is characterized as a journey away from the *here* that is life. Now, maybe the term refers to a literal journey that the man was taking when he happened to be eaten by a wolf. The mother then laments the fact that he left at all, only to be eaten. But I do not think this is the case, due to the context of other language of the journey that points to a metaphor of death as departure.

Next, hunger is the hypothetical man’s killer: “sumne sceal hungor ahiþan” [“hunger must destroy one”] (15a). If, as the DOE has it, *ahyþan* means “to lay waste, destroy; plunder” (1), where is the metaphor? But a closer look at the verb reveals an enlightening derivation. *Hyþan* itself means “to despoil, plunder, lay waste, pillage, ravage” (BT), which is essentially the same meaning as the compound word. The prefix

¹⁰⁴ Hrothgar in *Beowulf* uses this term to signify death as a final time in the lives of all men (1753).

¹⁰⁵ Stefan Jurasinski notes that eating or devouring bodies runs through the poem’s death imagery (347). Though this one with the wolf is quite literal, later deaths have hunger and fire likewise consuming the victim, as well as a bird picking at a corpse.

a-, however, add can add a locative force of “away.”¹⁰⁶ This latent meaning is activated in this context of the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor to give an added sense of motion away to the destruction most directly communicated by the verb. Hunger destroys and removes the victim of its killing action.

The third misfortune clearly exhibits death as departure and some kind of movement away: “sumne sceal hreoh fordriƿan” [“rough weather¹⁰⁷ must drive one away”] (15b). The victim is forced out, presumable out of life and into death, with these concepts conceived of as places. The fourth and fifth deaths in the poem again employ the *a-* prefix in the verbs expressing the killings. The weight of three verbs in two lines with the *a-* prefix supports the notion of a meaning of “away.” Next the speaker states, “sumne sceal gar agetan, sumne guð abreotan” [“the spear must destroy one, war kill another”] (16). Bosworth-Toller gives “to seize, take away, destroy” for *agetan*, clearly indicating the sense of movement away.¹⁰⁸ As was the case with *ahyƿan*, both *abreotan* and *breotan* mean “to kill” or “to destroy.” Again, I suggest the *a-* prefix encodes a sense of movement away. War and spear cause the victims to be killed by removing them from the *here* of life.

¹⁰⁶ Clark Hall says that the prefix originally meant “forth, away, but as a rule only intensive in meaning.” Mitchell and Robinson note that it “sometimes means ‘away’” but can also “have no effect on the meaning” (58).

¹⁰⁷ *Hreoh* often implies weather, as I translate it here, but can also mean a more general roughness, savageness, or disturbance (BT).

¹⁰⁸ The DOE, however, only lists “to destroy, strike down (with a spear)” (1) for the primary sense of the verb. Perhaps this is a correction to a false-etymology interpretation from Bosworth-Toller.

The next two misfortunes are not, in fact, deaths. The youth could instead be maimed, deprived of sight or mobility. But the eighth misfortune¹⁰⁹ does lead to death, this example described at some length:

Sum sceal on holte of hean beame
fīperleas feallan; bið on flihte sepeah,
laceð on lyfte, oþþæt lengre ne bið
westem wudubeames. þonne he on wyrtruman
sigeð sworcenferð, sawle bireafod,
fealleþ on foldan, feorð biþ on siþe (21-26)

[One must fall featherless from a high tree in the wood; he is still in flight, he soars in the sky, until he is no longer fruit of the tree. Then he sinks dark-spirited to the root, bereft of soul he falls to the earth, his life is on a journey.]

This story of one who is killed fallen from a tree has occasioned some debate over why a young man would be up in a tree in the first place.¹¹⁰ What is clear is that he falls from a tree to his death. The falling and sinking down are often metaphorical ways to describe death, as we will see in the section of this chapter on battle poetry, but the clear evocation of the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor is in the last phrase (26b): the man's spirit is now on a journey—the journey that indicates absence from life and therefore death. It is

¹⁰⁹ Karen Swenson argues that the fates from the fall from the tree (21-26) to the hanging from the gallows (43-47) are ritual deaths.

¹¹⁰ Suggestions include initiation ritual, athletic activity, an allusion to Christ on the cross, house-building, a lookout, falcon-gatherers, collecting leaves, or just wool-gathering. See Neil Isaacs for a review of these and elaboration of his initiation theory. Of course, the man could just be a shepherd looking out for his sheep.

important to note here that the man has undergone some kind of separation in death, for the poem clearly specifies that he is deprived of his soul (25b) and that it is his life which makes the journey. His body, after its momentarily liberating flight, presumably remains on the ground, though this physical state is not what the poem finally focuses our attention on (references to the roots and the ground ultimately give way to the journey, which ends this example). Indeed, the flight to the ground is actually liberating, in the sense that it occasions the release of the man's soul to undertake the journey of death. Additionally, the man is "sworcenferð," which darkening of mind could point to the internal violence of self that indicates death—the *ferhþ* is dark through absence or occlusion.

The next misfortune is another one not properly of death; this time the fate suffered is the classic Old English punishment of exile:

Sum sceal on feþe on feorwegas
nyde gongan ond his nest beran,
tredan uriglast elþeodigra,
frecne foldan; ah he feormendra
lyt lifgendra, lað biþ æghwær
fore his wonsceaftum wineleas hæle (27-32)

[One, of necessity, must go on foot in far-ways and carry his food, tread foreign lands in the dewy path of exiles, a dangerous land; he has few living entertainers, he is hated everywhere because of his misery, friendless man.]

With its distant location, hint of damp weather, danger, isolation and misery, this passage is a miniature version of the condition of exile portrayed in poems like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Exile, while not death, is treated in these other poems as a social or cultural death. It is fitting then that it takes the form of a journey away from what makes up the good life for the Anglo-Saxon (hall, kin, friends) to an unknown and hostile land. Thus, even though this misfortune is not literally death, it is comprised of all the trappings of a journey, which elsewhere in this poem indicate death, founded in the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor.

Death on the gallows follows this description of exile. This victim is said to “on geapum galgan ridan” [“swing on wide gallows”] (33). The verb *ridan*, which I here translate as “swing” following other translators, means primarily “ride.” Both meanings give some sense of movement that might be consistent with what I argue is the controlling metaphor for the poem. Additionally the hanging body becomes “abrocen” [“broken”] (35b), with perhaps another instance of the “away” prefix *a-*. The body is “sawelleasne” [“soulless”] (37b), indicating another kind of absence, departure, or internal separation of self. Finally, this victim of misfortune is said to have “his lif scæcen” [“his life shaken”] (39b), probably in the sense of the life being shaken out of him. This image would seem to participate in a LIFE IS A VITAL FLUID metaphor, and thus DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION). One translator, perhaps influenced by the predominance of departure metaphor in the poem as whole, gives for this line “his life is departed” (Swenson).

Following the gallows, the poem moves to fire as the cause of death, though there is less clear departure language here. The section does employ another *a*-prefix verb:

“sumne on bæle sceal brond aswencan” [“fire must afflict one in flame”] (43). And the death is articulated as “lifgedal” [“life-separation”] (45). While these two examples give hints of the movement of death, there is nothing explicitly based on the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor.

Death by the sword, however, unambiguously evokes the metaphor: “sumum mecce ead on meodubence / yrrum ealowosan ealdor oppringeð” [“the sword’s edge drives out life from some, on the mead-bench with an angry ale-drinker”] (48-49). Bosworth-Toller defines *oppringan* as “to force away from one.” It is the man’s life (“ealdor”) which is departing, having been driven out by the sword. This example where it is some semi-personified aspect of the man like his “life” that undertakes the departure is not unusual with such metaphors. Either the subject (or self) or a component thereof (spirit, soul, life) can depart in death. Perhaps this final misfortune for our hypothetical young man is really death by beer. He gets drunk and loses control of his tongue, which costs him his life: “ac sceal ful earmlice ealdre linnan, / dreogan dryhtenbealo dreamum biscyred” [“but he must very miserably lose his life, endure great evil, deprived of joys”] (54-55).¹¹¹ The DOE can perhaps help us with the cause of the man’s death; it defines *dryhten-bealu* as “loss of a lord.” Perhaps the drunken man has said something leading to his exile and thus loss of a lord. Perhaps the man has even killed his lord, as *bealu* usually indicates a very severe condition, like death. Another possibility is that the lord refers to his mind—the poet has just stated that the youth cannot control his mouth with his mind:

¹¹¹ Nicholas Howe focuses on the speaker’s attestation that men will call this man “sylfcwale” [“self-killer”] (56a) to consider the death a suicide (*Old English Catalogue Poems* 122-24). I take the phrase as indirect suicide only—something the man has done has carelessly, though not intentionally, led to his death. Joseph Harris agrees with me in his review of Howe’s book: “It would be meaningless to say ‘people will call him a suicide’ if he literally was a suicide” (954). Stefan Jurasinski unconvincingly supports Howe with reference to legislative and archaeological evidence (352-55).

“þonne he gemet ne con / gemearcian his muþe mode sine” [“then he knows no measure, how to determine his mouth with his mind”] (52b-53b). If a mind is something that can exert control of over something like speech, then it possesses the power of rule and metaphorically functions as a lord. Somehow this lack of control¹¹² gets our young man killed. The metaphor used to convey this is DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION), coming through in the phrase “ealdre linnan” [“lose life”]. Calling him deprived of joys is yet another way to express the man’s death. In all, though, I do not detect much that could reflect DEATH IS DEPARTURE in this example that ends this catalog of misfortunes which gives way to a list of what gifts men can receive.¹¹³

My point in tracking through each of the thirteen misfortunes is twofold—first, to begin to show the variety of metaphors that combine to communicate the death of one individual or more generally death in one text; second, to show how one particular metaphor can dominate death in one text. In *The Fortunes of Men*, DEATH IS DEPARTURE is evoked most often, and generally across the board in the poetic corpus. Of the ten misfortunes that certainly lead to death, this metaphor is clear in five of them, and probable in another four. Only the final misfortune seems to lack any notion of movement away in its death scenario. Even the misfortune of exile, which lacks an explicit death, resonates with the imagery of a terminal journey. Life as a possession whose removal indicates death appears in two of the deaths, making that metaphor the

¹¹² Self-control is a common theme of gnomic advice, as in *The Wanderer* (11b-21, 64-69) and *Maxims I* (45-50a).

¹¹³ Karen Swenson argues that this latter section responds to the first: “by presenting us with this savior, [Catalogue II] proclaims salvation and seeks to save meaning, to convert it from death to life” (135).

second most represented (not counting the more or less literal ways of speaking of the man's destruction).

What significance, then, does this particular proportion of death illustrations have? I would argue that it represents a fairly neutral understanding of death, for these death-as-departure expressions are not especially communicative of a specific theme or attitude. On the plains of the wide world,¹¹⁴ on the journey of life, when people die, they just keep going until they are out of sight, no longer with us. To support the claim that the death is departure metaphor is the most unmarked, I will turn to a prose text, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a year-by-year account of major political and ecclesiastical happenings in medieval England.¹¹⁵ As such a record, the *Chronicle* lists a great many deaths. Even with its “terse, objective, and colorless” style (Greenfield and Calder 60), the *Chronicle* relies on metaphor to articulate death. Two verbs for dying predominate: *forðferan* and *forlættan*. For example, for the year 983, the entry begins “her forðferde Ælfere ealdorman” [“here Aldorman Alfere went-forth”]. The next year, we have “her forðferde se halga biscop Aðelwold” [“here the holy bishop Athelwold went-forth”]. In these two examples, the verb *forðferan* [“to go forth”] is used to say “die.” This is due to the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor. Elsewhere, for the year 988, the *Chronicle* reads “her Dunstan se halga arcebiscop forlet þis lif” [“here the holy archbishop Dunstan left this life”]. Likewise in 992, it reads “her Oswald se eadig arcebishop forlet þis lif” [“here the blessed archbishop Oswald left this life”]. The verb *forlættan* means “to leave” in both

¹¹⁴ See Chapter IV for more on the metaphorical character of the world.

¹¹⁵ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is not just one document, but exists in seven different forms now, all deriving from a late 9th century original. The examples I use are from the Peterborough Chronicle (E version).

the transitive and intransitive senses: either “to depart” or “to release.” If the former, we have another instance of DEATH IS DEPARTURE; if the latter, we have LIFE IS A POSSESSION, which in death is released. The *Chronicle* is saturated with these two verbs, especially *forðferan*, used to express death.¹¹⁶ The evidence from the *Chronicle* strongly suggests that departing or leaving is a “natural” way to express death, supporting my claims about *The Fortunes of Men* that this metaphor is the most neutral of those under discussion here.

Death’s Destination and Martyrs’ Gifts: *The Fates of the Apostles*

If death is most often understood as a departure, then that raises the question of where the departed person (or self or soul) is traveling to. Where does the departed soul go? What is the destination of the ensuing journey? Conceptual metaphor allows just such entailments to be developed and elaborated. The examples from *The Fortunes of Men* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* we have examined do not follow through on this aspect of the metaphor to explicitly indicate a destination. Other poems, however, do make this destination explicit. As a Christian culture, the Anglo-Saxons designate this place most often as some form of heaven, though not always in explicitly scriptural or clearly spatial ways. How this heavenly destination is variously characterized can be interesting, as it builds a conceptual model for a cultural understanding of heaven.¹¹⁷ To

¹¹⁶ The verb *forlættan* appears in the A version 11 times, C: 13, D: 14, E: 30, F: 10. And *forðferan* appears in A 95 times, C: 104, D: 126, E: 185, F: 127. Of course, not all of these instances will be expressions for death (less for *forlættan*), but a quick glance over the corpus search will show that the vast majority do apply to a death. (MS B for the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not seem to appear in the DOE Corpus searches, but it is very similar to C, so I would expect its verb counts to be similar as well.)

¹¹⁷ I will return to this conception in more detail in Chapter IV.

demonstrate this conception, I'll take a look now at another catalog poem which also includes many deaths, *The Fates of the Apostles*.

Found in the Vercelli Book and signed by Cynewulf,¹¹⁸ *The Fates of the Apostles* is a short martyrology, taking the form of a report from a speaker who has traveled the world widely and accumulated the stories of the widely-known twelve apostles, specifically what became of them after their time with Christ as they undertook missions of conversion. Their travels and their lives end, almost invariably, with death.¹¹⁹ These deaths are characterized with a wide variety of different metaphorical expression, with versions of each of the three major categories listed in the chapter introduction, plus interesting extensions or combinations of these metaphors.¹²⁰ Ultimately, the poem offers an orthodox mix of ways to describe death, focusing most on a heavenly destination and life as willingly given. As with *The Fortunes of Men*, I will proceed death by death in *The Fates of the Apostles* to describe how their deaths are characterized, paying special attention to the ways the poem extends the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor to offer a view on the destination of these holy deaths.

Peter and Paul are the first two apostles treated in the poem, their fates linked together as they both die in Rome under Nero. The speaker explains that the two apostles “feorh ofgefon” [“gave up life”] (12b). This expression can represent either DEATH IS

¹¹⁸ Runes, which rearranged spell the name Cynwulf, appear toward the end of the poem. According to Greenfield and Calder, “Cynewulf was undoubtedly a literate man who lived in the first half of the ninth century, a cleric, whose native dialect was Anglian (probably West Mercian)” (164).

¹¹⁹ Cynewulf's potential sources are many: Jerome, Isidore, or Bede (Brooks xxx), the fifth of Aldhelm's *Tituli* (Greenfield and Calder 11), a widely circulated Latin text, *Breuiarium apostolorum* (Lapidge, “Saintly” 259), a martyrology by Usuard (Conner, “On Dating Cynewulf”), or some “as yet unidentified passionary” (Fulk and Cain 134).

¹²⁰ Brooks maintains that “The poem has no literary merit” (xxxi), though the range of metaphor I have shown belies this claim.

DEPARTURE or DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION). The verb in this phrase, *ofgifan* derives from *gyfan*, which means “to give” (DOE), which supports the possession interpretation. But the complex verb means “to give up, leave, abandon” (BT), which implies a place which one leaves, thus supporting the departure reading. Bosworth-Toller also notes that the verb can extend its object from a place to “this present life” (IIIa), recognizing the way locations come to represent states. But there is no elaboration of the destination of death for these two apostles.

Andrew is the third apostle to meet his doom in *The Fates of the Apostles*: he dies in Achaia,¹²¹ with the poet using at least three expressions to express his life and death. First, Andrew “for Egias aldre geneðde” [“risked his life before Aegius”] (17). This line clearly treats life as an object or a possession, which is able to be risked. Second, the speaker says, “ac him ece geceas / langsumre lif, leoht unhwilen” [“but he chose for himself long eternal life, unending light”] (19b-20b). This passage, which basically means that Andrew died, is surprisingly complex, with at least three distinct metaphors operating. Andrew chooses eternal life and unending light, states of existence distinct from ordinary life and death. Since STATES ARE LOCATIONS, Andrew must move from this life with the act of dying (DEATH IS DEPARTURE), and proceed to another life, one which differs from this one only in duration—it is long, everlasting, and eternal. The choice of unending light depends on another metaphor for life—LIFE IS LIGHT. Light can indicate life because it is associated with human activity—activity is one way to discern that a human being lives; since we are primarily diurnal creatures, light prototypically

¹²¹ See Nicholas Howe (*Catalogue* 86-103) for an explanation of the geographical logic of these successive travels.

accompanies activity. In other words, we human beings go about our business during the day, implicitly connecting life and light in our conceptual systems. Sunlit days come to an end with night, as does human activity (mostly), just as human lives come to an end with death (mostly?). So if this new life is eternal, the light that stands in for it must be too. These expressions communicate the spatial destination for a place of death. Life as light suggests that life is the place where earthly light, as defined by the sun or fire, shines. These ordinary lights here on earth all must end in darkness at some point in time. But eternal light, that of God, shines in a different place—heaven. Andrew’s death involves a change of location. Of course, the idea of death as eternal life and light, reached after following a “way,” ultimately derives from scripture (e.g. John 9.5, 14.6). Andrew’s choice of these things, though, has a particularly Old English flavor. I will return to this idea of choice shortly.

The third and final reference to Andrew’s death in *The Fates of the Apostles* comes as the poet briefly describes the outcome of a battle in which Andrew perished: “æfter guðplegan / gealgan þehte” [“after war-play, he covered the gallows”] (22). The verb form here, “þehte,” comes from *þeccan*, which Bosworth-Toller defines as “to cover an object with something.” But this use of covering isn’t completely clear, so the half-line has been variously translated: “he lay on the cross” (Gordon), “he tasted the gallows” (Boenig), and “he hung upon the cross” (Kennedy). The variety of verbs used to translate “þehte,” from *lie* to *taste* to *hang*, attest to the difficulty of understanding the sense in which Andrew might cover the gallows (or cross). I suspect this is due to the loss of some metaphorical understanding of the action portrayed (or at least of the full semantic range of *þeccan*). Based on a knowledge of bodies on a gallows or a cross, which we now

describe primarily as hanging, we must assume that covering was one way the Anglo-Saxons could think of the event.¹²² A body certainly covers part of a cross as it is hung from it and draped across it, supporting the translation of “gealgan” as a cross rather than a gallows, which indicates a built structure from which one hangs from a rope. Or the covering action could just be a way that the Anglo-Saxons thought of hanging. Perhaps, along the lines of modern English, “I’ll cover the bill,” meaning I will pay or take care of the bill, “to cover” in this broadened sense can mean “to accomplish.” Old English *þeccan* could mean a more general “to have close physical connection to.” In any case, though the expression as a whole may not be metaphorical,¹²³ it is certainly a way to say that Andrew has died.

The next apostle in poem, John, is not as obviously described as dying, but our knowledge of the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor makes his death evident. After his time teaching in Ephesus, John is said to take a journey: “þanon lifes weg / siðe gesohte, swegle dreamas, / beorhtne boldwelan” [“from there he sought by journey, life’s way, joys in heaven, bright wealth-house”] (31b-33a). John seeks three basic things—a way, joys, and a house—and does so by way of a journey—all indications of death. Thus, when John will seek, through a journey, life’s way, he is following the journey of life as structured by the metaphor. The word “siðe,” coupled with the phrase “lifes weg,” together point explicitly to this understanding of death as a journey. We have no mention of a physical, geographic destination or route, so calling the way one of life encourages

¹²² Though, a few lines later, the poem describes Philip’s death as hanging on gallows: “on galgan...ahangen wæs” [“he was hung on gallows”] (40-41). This suggests a sense of hanging already encoded into the use of *þeccan* at issue here.

¹²³ In all other occurrences of this phrase, it means literally that someone was on a cross/gallows, for example Christ in *Andreas* (966).

us to read metaphorically—life is a road. The destination of this journey is suggested by the other two phrases at issue here, “*swegle dreamas*” and “*beorhtne boldwelan*.” Each reflects the same conception of death as another place, specifically heaven, though they use different pointers to allude to it. The first expression, “*swegle dreamas*,” articulates the goal of John’s search as joys, but importantly locates those joys with the dative “*swegle*” [“in heaven”]. And the second of these phrases, “*beorhtne boldwelan*,” clearly indicates a structure (*bold*) as the destination and goal of the journey. The house he seeks is noted for its wealth and brightness, both associative descriptors of heaven. Death for John is another place, defined as the end of a journey whose destination is heaven.

John’s brother James meets a clear death, at the hand of Herod, as he must “*ealdre gedælan, / feorh wið flæsce*” [“separate from life, soul from flesh”] (36b-37a). James dies through the “*sweordes bite*” [“sword’s bite”] (34b), which is itself an expression of the metaphor of personification.¹²⁴ Though there is no indication of large-scale movement as in travel to death as a destination here, James’ death is characterized as a separation between aspects of James’s body or self. Thus DEATH IS FRACTURING OF SELF. The verb *gedælan* primarily communicates the concept of separation, with the DOE defining it as “to divide into parts or into smaller groups” (1) and “to separate, part (from)” (5). The DOE even notes for this particular citation that the verb is a “mixed construction where *gedælan* is used first intransitively, ‘part from’, then transitively with acc. in the sense ‘separate’” (5), though I think these two uses are semantically derived from the same

¹²⁴ A *bite* is centrally the result of the action of an intentional, animate being, with the first definition in the DOE “bite of an animal, bird, or reptile” (1). Secondly, *bite* means “cut of a sword or weapon” (2). The transference is either due to personification, as here with the “*sweordes bite*” or metonymy, from the action to the result (bite to pain from bite). See chapter 1 for more on how personification is explained from a conceptual metaphorical point of view.

sense of separation that involves the LIFE IS A POSSESSION metaphor. Being separated from this possession life, whether for James himself or his flesh, means death. The variation which explains that life separates from flesh also rests upon the idea of life as a possession. But, as we saw in Chapter II, there is a little more going on with this particular separation. Specifically, death is the parting of two aspects of a person, the body, here communicated metonymically by *flæsc*, and the soul, one of the common senses of *feorh*. Because the dividing of these personified components of the self is so common in the literature,¹²⁵ it seems best to speak of a DEATH IS SEPARATION OF BODY AND SOUL metaphor, rather than just explain James's death in terms of the LIFE IS A POSSESSION metaphor, though both signify a fracturing of the self.

Philip is next—he dies among the Asians: “þanon ece lif / þurh rode cwealm ricene gesohte” [“from there he quickly sought eternal life through death on the cross”] (38b-39b). The only indication of traveling to a place of death is in the act of searching as indicated by the verb *gesecan* which often involves physical movement (BT IV). The death he seeks, made possible through the instrumental help of the cross, is eternal life, again conceived of as a location or destination.

Bartholomew has his head cut off by Astrages in Albania, though the speaker of the poem obliquely states that Bartholomew was “heafde beneotan” [“deprived of the use of his head”] (46b). To lose one's head is, of course, to die, but there is nothing exceptionally metaphorical about this description, except as the cause of death being used to express the state of death. Before this, however, the apostle was in India where he “aldre gelædde” [“led his life”] (43b). The notion of leading a life, one that remains with

¹²⁵ The prime example is the two *Soul and Body* poems, but the image occurs often elsewhere.

the language today, could indicate the route of life as a journey. But this life seems more likely to be an accessory of the person leading it, resulting from LIFE IS A POSSESSION. Bosworth-Toller gives “conduct,” “bear,” and “bring” as additional senses for the verb *gelædan*, senses which reinforce the idea of life as a possession that one takes when one travels about. It is interesting that life as the object of *gelædan* suggests qualities of an animate being (or even a burden), as the verb often takes people as its object.¹²⁶

Famous for evangelizing in India, Thomas is said to have awakened the king’s brother who then arose from death: “Syððan collenferð cyninges broðor / awehte for weorodum, wundorcræfte, / þurh dryhtnes miht, þæt he of deaðe aras” [“Afterwards the bold-spirited one awoke the king’s brother before the troops with miraculous skill through the Lord’s might, so that he arose from death”] (54-56). The most obvious death metaphor here is DEATH IS SLEEP, which follows from LIFE IS A DAY. As the day and its activity end in sleep, so does life end in death, which takes is equated with sleep in the metaphorical blend. This metaphor is apt because, though one does not literally wake from death, one does wake from sleep. So if death is sleep, there must be a waking from death as well—the miracle of eternal life. Death is also a physical place from which Gad, as we learn is the king’s brother’s name, also arises (“of deaðe aras”). While this is not a distant destination to return from, it is still a physical place being used to characterize a state, perhaps relying on the DEATH IS DOWN metaphor. Nevertheless this instance seems to be more due to downward position than the departure metaphor.

¹²⁶ This connotation of life is akin to the uses of life as a soul, which seems to possess its own sentience, if not subjectivity—see Chapter II for further discussion of conceptions for the soul.

For Thomas's own death, three phrases express his death in metaphorical terms. First, he "feorg gesealde" ["gave his life"] (58b), treating life as a possession. Next, "sweordræs fornam" ["a sword-rush took him"] (59b), which offers a little something new to the departure metaphor. Now, the victim of death is not merely leaving, but being forcibly taken away from life. The root of the verb *forniman* is *niman*, "to take, receive,"¹²⁷ but the compound adds the negative-intensifier prefix *for-*, which creates a sense of absolute taking away, often translated as destroying. So, for Thomas to be completely taken away is to be killed. We must understand this extreme form of taking to be death, for that is the only place from which one cannot return. While no destination is given, the metaphor making this dislocation sensible is, again, DEATH IS DEPARTURE. But who or what is doing the taking? The "sweordræs" is itself operating metaphorically as an agent of death (perhaps even a personification for death which is attested in Old English¹²⁸). Finally, the poem relates that "se halga gecrang" ["the holy one fell"] (60b). Thomas's triple death of giving, being taken, and falling well demonstrates an Anglo-Saxon propensity to meditate on an event and express it from several different angles.

Matthew's death merits only a direct report that the savage king Irtacus ordered him "wæpnum aswebban" ["killed by weapons"] (69b). The verb *aswebban*, however, has as its root *swebban*, meaning "to send to sleep, lull" (BT). It is the intensifying prefix *a-* which gives the compound verb the force of killing, for to push sleep to its

¹²⁷ For the verb *niman* to be translated as both "take" and "receive" in its primary sense for Bosworth-Toller, suggests it did not code for intention as the modern verbs just noted do: taking implies that the action is willed by the taker, while receiving implies that it is the giver's will causing the action.

¹²⁸ The opening of *Soul and Body II* has death come to part soul and body: "se deað cymeð, / asundrað þa sibbe, þa þe ær somud wæron, / lic ond sawle" ["death comes, separates the relations, who before were together, body and soul"] (3-6).

conceptually most intense form, sleep without end, is to cause death, a further reflex of the DEATH IS SLEEP (DEATH IS DOWN) metaphor.

The second James dies in Jerusalem, with three expressions of death to describe his fate. First, he “swilt þrowode” [“suffers death”] (71b) by staff blow at the hands of priests. There seems little not literal about this phrase. Next, James “stiðmod gecrang” [“strong-minded falls”] (72b). As with Thomas, death is conveyed by falling down. Finally, James “hafað nu ece lif / mid wuldorcining” [“now has eternal life with the glory-king”] (73b-74a). Eternal life is, again, a state of death, and having it is possessing it. But to say that he is *with* God, the glory-king, means that he is somewhere else, thus the destination of death includes God’s presence.

The final two apostles in the catalog, Simon and Thaddeus, are combined in the same fate (as were the first two). They are described as sharing together “an endedæg” [“one end-day”] (79a). This end-day is their death, characterized as a final day of life.¹²⁹ This passage isn’t properly metaphorical, but it does use a unit of time that can only be experienced in life, the day, to signal life, which, when ended, signifies death. They also seek those eternal rewards which we have seen equated with death: they must “sigelean secan, ond þone soðan gefean, / dream æfter deaðe” [“seek victory-reward, and rejoice at the truth, joy after death”] (81a-82a). The rewards they seek are truth and joy, atypical associations for death, but certainly consistent with medieval Christian conceptions of eternal life in heaven. What is interesting here, though, is that death is explicitly mentioned, but more as a point in time than a state of being—the apostles will not be happy *in* death, but *after* the event. This example shows that death for the Anglo-Saxons

¹²⁹ DOE: “last day (of one’s life), day of death, dying day” (b).

is not always a metaphorical condition or place, but sometimes can just be a simple event, lacking in conceptual duration. The last phrase used to express Simon and Thaddeus's death repeats the separation motif: "þa gedæled wearð / lif wið lice" ["then life was separated from body"] (82b-83a).

Cynewulf then summarizes the deaths of all twelve apostles with "ðus ða æðelingas ende gesealdon" ["thus the nobles gave their end"] (85). This passage is interesting because, if taken literally, it means they gave away a point of time (their end). A couple of metaphorical possibilities might make sense of the expression. First, it seems tempting to take the end as death itself—maybe the end indicates the last point in time of life, which coincides with and thus represents death. The DOE lists this as a common sense: "death (of a creature)" (B.4.b). But if this is so, how can death be given away? With LIFE IS A POSSESSION, the usual thing to give up to indicate death is life, not death itself. Perhaps, then the end is taken only for that last point of life, which, as we have seen, indicates death when lost. So, when the end of life is given away, it means that the apostles have died.

The Fates of the Apostles ends with a personal turn, with the speaker supplicating the audience for prayers and good will. He speaks of his own journey:

þonne ic sceal langne ham,
eardwic uncuð, ana gesecan,
lætan me on laste lic, eorðan dæl,
wælreaf wunigean weormum to hroðre (92b-95)

[then I must alone seek a long home, unknown dwelling-place, leave my
body in my tracks, a portion of earth, slaughter-spoil to dwell as comfort
for worms]

This passage encodes many of the conceptions of life and death that appear elsewhere in the poem, giving the speaker a kind of everyman (every-apostle?) identity. The speaker has a goal, something he seeks. To seek is to act upon a choice with a determined will; the speaker is in control (or at least in full, complicit acceptance) of his fate.¹³⁰ If he is talking about his coming death, which the analysis of the rest of the passage should support, then it is a welcome, chosen death, just as several of the apostles have experienced. On the whole, the speaker frames his course as a journey. To seek is not just to stand and look around, but to go and move in search of a goal.¹³¹ And the poem gives the goals as the “long home” and “unknown dwelling-place.” These are not quite as clearly the heaven that most of the apostles were traveling to—they lack the language of reward, power, glory, joy, etc. But I still think they refer to death (probably in the grave), not only for their language of home and dwelling,¹³² but especially for the adjective modifiers. The destination of this life journey, as death in the grave, is both far and unknown, appropriate characteristics which echo our lack of complete understanding for death. This is consistent with LIFE IS LIGHT and LIFE IS A PLACE HERE (therefore death is

¹³⁰ This control is somewhat undercut by the modal “sceal” (92b), which suggests necessity at best, but compulsion at worst. Nevertheless, the speaker still makes the journey alone, “ana” (93b), and therefore moves himself onward, even though the goal may be predetermined.

¹³¹ As supported by Bosworth-Toller’s sense II for *secan*, “to go or come to.”

¹³² Again, see Chapter IV for the spatial metaphorical structure of heaven.

far). The adjective *lang* can refer to time as well as space, so the home he seeks might be eternal, another marker for death that we've already seen.

The second half of this passage is even more revealing. The speaker states that he must leave his body in his tracks, which really seems to activate the separation metaphor and convey death as the parting of body and soul. He identifies himself with the soul, the spirit, or life, as the subject position which is capable of saying that he will leave his body behind. The body is called earth's share, appropriate from a scriptural point of view,¹³³ and slaughter-spoil, pointing to the expected violent manner of his upcoming death. Finally, that separated body will also have a home, as it will "wunigean" ["dwell"], as if it were a live person itself; but it will merely provide comfort for worms who will no doubt devour the body in the grave, which this language of the unknown home implies.¹³⁴ The death that the speaker of Cynewulf's poem will meet is characterized more by uncertainty and violence than those of most of the apostles he has just spoken about, perhaps in a rhetorical move of humility.

A summary of the metaphorical range of death in *The Fates of the Apostles*, reveals a meaningful pattern. There are six references to death that are more or less literal, often relying on the cause of death to indicate dying: on the gallows (22b), by a sword (34b), on a cross (39a), beheading (46b), and two terms denoting death directly (71b, 82b). Many more times, however, death is communicated through metaphor. Indeed

¹³³ Adam is, of course made from the earth, and his punishment after the fall is to return to the earth (Genesis 3.19). Ælfric's Old English version of the passage: "ðu brycst ðines hlafes oð ðæt ðu gewende to eorðan, of ðære ðe ðu genumen wære, for ðan ðe ðu eart dust and to duste gewyrst" ["you will eat your bread until you return to earth, from which you were taken, because you are dust and to dust you will change."] (Crawford and Ker).

¹³⁴ As they do in *Soul and Body II* where the body is "wyrma gifl" ["food for worms"] (22b).

many of these metaphors might seem to contradict (death is an end and unending), but they ultimately cohere with further metaphorical operation (death is life). To enumerate these metaphorical deaths, a number of metaphors or motifs are each used once or twice for death: as a thieving agent (59b), as sleep (54a-55b, 69b), as falling (60b, 72b), and as a temporal end point (79a, 85). Death as a separation of life and body occurs three times in the poem (36b-37a, 82b-83a, 94). This way of expressing death relates to the departure and journey conceptualization for death, but differs in that the physical movement away is partial—some part of the self (the body) remains while another part (life or soul) departs; the splitting is the key feature of this metaphor.

But the type of death I have focused on in this analysis is the destination of a journey to a place of death. To summarize the information we are given about this heavenly destination of death, it is a way of life (31b), a place of unending life and light (19b-20b), a bright house of wealth and heavenly joys (32b-33a), eternal life (38b), a place in God's presence (74a), and a place of truth and joy (81b-82a). Being long and unknown (92b-93a) could apply equally to heaven or to an earthly grave. This list is perhaps not as detailed as to be expected from a chapter section devoted to the destination of death's journey. The descriptors are rather oblique, with only one solidly physical term—the *boldwela* (33a). The other properties of the death place are visual (light), temporal (eternal), spatial (far), modal (joy), social (God), evaluative (truth), and epistemological (unknown). Death is a distant place of eternal life.¹³⁵ This scattered and diversified approach is not uncommon in the poetry.¹³⁶ These aspects, associated with

¹³⁵ I should point out that these metaphors, which frequently involve Christian beliefs about the afterlife and heaven, are not unique to overtly Christian poems, which should become clear soon.

¹³⁶ See Chapter IV for a fuller presentation of just such conceptions of heaven.

death as a separate place, give a more complete experience than a purely architectural reference could. The poem presents a heavenly death this way in order make that goal as appealing as possible. And it makes a good deal of sense to express the deaths of sainted martyrs in terms of their rewards for death, as these deaths were willingly sought or knowingly accepted.¹³⁷

There is one other major way that death is expressed in *The Fates of the Apostles*, as the release of the possession life. There are nine instances of life being metaphorically characterized as an object in the poem: as a possession that is given away (12b, 58b, 85b), parted with (36b, 37a, 83a), risked (17b), led (43b), or had (73b). The six times the object life is given up or parted with all indicate death, following the DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION) metaphor. This way of expressing death is entirely appropriate for a poem which recounts the deaths of Christian martyrs. For them to give their lives willingly reinforces their status as martyrs dying for their cause of evangelism. Unsurprisingly, in the final analysis, *The Fates of the Apostles* most saliently characterizes life as something to be willingly given by martyrs and death as an eternal heavenly reward to be fully experienced by those who sacrifice themselves for God.

The Loss of *Beowulf*

In the analysis of *The Fates of the Apostles*, I noted that death is often communicated as the loss (usually willing) of life, conceived of as a possession. This understanding of death is certainly appropriate for the death of martyrs who are defined by the fact that they intentionally die for Christ. But this effect is not the only one which can be generated from a high concentration of loss metaphors for death. The Old English

¹³⁷ I will return to this idea of willing death in a later section of this chapter.

epic poem *Beowulf* employs these metaphors often—more than any other kind for death, but with a host of other types as well. Indeed, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that *Beowulf* is all about death, though it would be more precise to say that the poem deals with the ways its imagined Germanic warriors anticipate death, face death, and reflect on death. This death is not only that of individual heroes, monsters, and warriors, but also of entire civilizations. *Beowulf* has in fact been characterized as one long nostalgic lament for the past.¹³⁸ Loss permeates the poem and its language. My purpose here will be to show that the particular metaphors for the deaths of individuals in the poem pattern in such a way to highlight an acute sense of loss.

My treatment of *Beowulf* includes a summary and analysis of the overall pattern of death metaphor deployment, followed by examinations of death language relating to specific people or peoples in the poem. I have identified somewhere in the neighborhood of 260-270 individual verbs, nouns and phrases that indicate death in the poem. About 80% of these instances are from the point of view of the one dying, featuring the dying person as the grammatical subject, while the rest focus on the killer and the act of killing. In a poem so often deemed heroic,¹³⁹ this focus on a passive death, one that is suffered

¹³⁸ Roy Liuzza explains, “*Beowulf* is a Christian poet’s bittersweet elegy for the doomed heroic life, the futility of forging peace by the works of war, the instability of the bonds formed by gifts and exchange and inter-tribal marriage, and the impossibility of permanence in a world whose knowledge is tragically limited” (*Beowulf* 38). Anne Savage adds a more urgent sense of loss: “It is difficult not to read the poem as a farewell, both to the best of the Germanic past in the figures of Scyld and Beowulf, but also to a conceivable English identity and bearable future” (“Grave” 80). James Earl sums the overall sense of this loss: “The poem ends with the passing of Beowulf, the passing of his nation, and the passing of the heroic world altogether, and mourns all these losses. It is a poem of mourning, an act of cultural mourning” (47).

¹³⁹ Michael Lapidge also discredits the idea of an exalting heroic poem: “If it is the first concern of heroic poetry to tell of action, to make its primary appeal through story, and to avoid symbolic language, then I submit that *Beowulf* is in no sense a heroic poem” (*Beowulf* 373). Instead the poem “is very much taken up with reflection—on human activity and conduct, on the transience of human life—and it is couched throughout in language that is characteristically oblique and allusive” (374).

more often than it is actively caused, conveys a startling lack of agency. *Beowulf* does not so much glory in the killings of Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon, as it wallows in the deaths of Danes and Geats. The poem repeatedly emphasizes the experiences and consequences of those who die, not of those who kill. Thus the poem is much sadder than it is exulting: grief and lament dominate the psychological experience of the poem, not glory and gloating.¹⁴⁰

I'll start with the killings, before treating the more numerous dyings.¹⁴¹ Of those killings, most passages use some verb that expresses violent physical contact, whether concussive (*slean*, *geslean*, *ofslean*, *abredwian*), lacerating (*slitan*, *bitan*, *heawan*, *purhwadan*), consuming (*drincan*, *gefeormian*, *reafian*, *swelgan*), seizing (*forgripan*, *forniman*, *gefon*, *geniman*), approach (*genægan*, *neosian*, *secan*), deprivation (*beneotan*, *besnyþpan*, *bineotan*, *forgyfan*, *gedælan*), or some other action (*gesceþpan*, *genægan*, *gefyldan*, *yðan*). Other verbs just indicate killing more or less directly: *abreotan*, *acwellan*, *breotan*. Several additional verbs are used in more metaphorical senses for killing: serving (*þenian*), sleeping (*swebban*), separating (*gedælan*), and paying (*forgyfan*). Only a few of all of these killing verbs are repeated often: *slean*, *ofslean*, *abreotan*, and *acwellan*. Thus we can see that to communicate killing, it is most common to use the violent method of attack to express the killing, with the more usual metaphors like DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION) far less frequently used when death is

¹⁴⁰ See Anne Savage ("Grave") and Owen-Crocker for a representative treatment of the themes of loss, grief, and lament in *Beowulf*.

¹⁴¹ For the present analysis I will focus on verbs involved in communicating death, though a similar analysis could be performed on the nouns and phrases that denote death in *Beowulf*. To distinguish events of killing from those of dying, I identify the grammatical subject of the verb—if this is a human or animate being, the death is a killing; if the grammatical subject is also the patient of death, or an abstract force like fate or death itself, the death is an instance of dying.

conveyed as the result of a specific killer. When these active agents of death receive attention in the poem for the act of killing, they are portrayed in terms as violent as possible. This strangely distances the act of killing from the act of dying. Killing is far less important, a mere instrument for achieving a death whose meaning and manner is developed much more metaphorically. Most of the descriptions for killing are followed by an elaboration of the dying.

So it is those who die, the passive recipients of death in *Beowulf*, who receive the overwhelming share of attention through expressions for death. Neutral expressions for death are relatively uncommon in *Beowulf*. Just six times does the simple verb for dying, *sweltan*, occur in the poem (892b, 1617b, 2358b, 2474b, 2782b, 3037b), with the periphrastic “wesan dead” occurring only once (467b). At another point a group of warriors is merely referred to as diminishing (477a). Twice death is referred to with a negative: not living (974a) or not dwelling in the hall (3065b) any longer. A few times death is represented as experiencing an end (1386b, 2342b, 3046b), which is another fairly neutral way to express it, marking only a temporal point. The approach of a somewhat personified end also marks death in the poem (822, 3035b); likewise meeting fate means death for Beowulf (2421b). Being separated—from life (2422b, 2742b), or from the world (3068), or from strength (1763b)—appears only a few times to indicate death for a character.

More frequently attested than the neutral expressions for death just mentioned are those involving the physical experience of death. Sometimes this experience is violent, as with the killing language; such attacks occur variously: as an approach with *gebædan* (2826a) and *secan* (2422a); as a strike with *drepan* (2981b), *gebeatan* (2359a), and *slean*

(1152b, 2355b); as an act of over-powering with *oferswyðan* (1768b) or disturbing with *geswengan* (2438b); as hanging with *hangian* (2447b); as shooting with *ofsceotan* (2439b); as melting with *meltan* (897b); and as bursting with *berstan* (818a) and *onspringan* (817b). In a more obliquely violent (hypothetical) death, Beowulf notes it is sad for a father to see his son, “giong on galgan” [“going¹⁴² on the gallows”] (2446a). Thus violence still does factor into the descriptions of those who die, but this is a small portion of verbs used for dying. Other death verb occurrences communicate death through the physical consequences of a lethal attack—downward motion or position: of falling with *cringan* (twice), *feallan* (three times), *gecringan* (four times), *gedreosan* (1754b), *gefeallan* (three times), *gesigan* (2659a), and *hreosan* (four times); of bowing with *bugan* (2918b) and *gebugan* (2980b); of lying with *licgan* (twelve times); of decaying with *brosnian* (2260a); and of sleeping with *swebban* (five times). Keeping (3034a) or arranging (2436b) beds also stem from this metaphor of death as a kind of sleep. DEATH IS DOWN is the overarching metaphor behind all of these expressions, which lends the deaths a more peaceful character, though still conveying powerlessness and impotence, than the ones overtly marked by violence.¹⁴³

Having accounted for verbs of killing and of dying in a violent fashion, we turn to those involving a metaphorical loss or movement away, which represent by far the most overwhelming understanding of death presented in *Beowulf*. These deaths fall into three categories. First, one may depart or leave (or some spiritual, vital part of the self will leave the body). Second, one may be forcibly pushed or taken away by an abstraction like

¹⁴² *Giong* could also be a form of *geong* [“young”].

¹⁴³ See below for more on the effects of the DEATH IS DOWN metaphor in battle poetry.

death or battle. Third, one's life (as an object) may be lost, taken, or given away. These three kinds of death, with their two related conceptual metaphors (DEATH IS DEPARTURE and DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION)), account for close to half of all verbal instances of death in *Beowulf*.

The first kind of movement-away death stems from the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor. The verbs which express the kind of metaphorical death are those of travelling or journeying (*feran*, *forsiðian*, *geferan*, *siðian*), of leading (*forlædan*, *lædan*), of departing (*gewitan*), of turning (*gehweorfan*, *hweorfan*), of seeking (*secan*), or other movement (*sceacan*, *astigan*). For example, when Beowulf explains Hrethel's death, the Geatish hero explains, "he of life gewat" ["he departed from life"] (2471b). And, of the Danish Beowulf's father Scyld, it is said that he "ellor hwearf" ["turned elsewhere"] (55b). An example without the dying subject leaving comes when Beowulf the Geat himself dies: "him of hreðre gewat / sawol secean soðfæstra dom" ["his soul departed from his chest to seek judgment of true-fast ones"] (2819b-20b). Here it is Beowulf's soul which departs. These death expressions emphasize the distant remove which the one dying undertakes in death; these victims of death move on to another place under their own power (as implied by the grammar and semantics of the active verbs involved).

The second kind of movement-away death also derives from DEATH IS DEPARTURE. But whereas the previous set of deaths were self-moved, this set includes or implies some abstract agent doing the removal. The verbs involved in this group require the victim as the direct object; they include verbs of taking (*beniman*, *forniman*, *niman*, *onfon*), sending (*forsendan*, *onsendan*), or even sweeping away (*forswapen*). The agent can be fate: of Hygelac, it is said that "hyne wyrd fornam" ["fate took him"] (1205b).

War can be the agent taking victims of death: regarding Finn's warriors, the speaker comments that "wig ealle fornam" ["war took them all"] (1080b). Death itself can be the moving agent: referring to the Danish warriors whom Grendel killed, Hrothgar laments, "deað fornam" ["death took them"] (488b). These kind of deaths give more of an impression of powerlessness in the face of forces beyond the control of individuals—numinous forces like fate and death, or large-scale human forces like war, but also individual weapons, as for the dragon, for whom "hyne ecg fornam" ["sword took him"] (2772b). Both the world outside of men and the world created by men can snatch people away in death, giving the sense of impotent man caught between two worlds, yet under the sway of both.

DEATH IS LOSS OF LIFE (A POSSESSION) stands behind the third category of movement-away death. There is a variety of different shapes this action can take to communicate the loss of life, each conveying a slightly different understanding of death. The most common is simple loss (*linnan*, *losian*) by the victim. For example, Beowulf gives instructions should he "aldre linnan" ["lose his life"] (1478a); later he laments how Herebeald must "ealdres linnan" ["lose his life"] (2443b) unavenged. Rather than just passively losing it, life can be given away (*alætan*, *ofgifan*, *sellan*, *alecgan*, *oflætan*), as when Beowulf, in his dying moments, says he will "min alætan lif" ["give up my life"] (2750b-51a). This conception of giving away life in death is expressed in the Last Survivor's lament, when he says that his people "pis lif ofgeaf" ["gave up this life"] (2251b), and about the hart, who would rather "feorh seleð" ["give his life"] (1370b) than enter Grendel's mere. Life need not be named directly, but instead it can be expressed by some other concept that metonymically stands in for it: Beowulf comments that Hrethel

“gumdream ofgeaf” [“gave up joy among men”] (2469a). The Geatish messenger reports that Beowulf has “hleahtr alegde” [“laid aside laughter”] (3020b). Grendel’s mother “oflet lifdagas ond þas lænan gesceaft” [“gave up her life-days and this loaned creation”] (1622), expressing a complex of components that indicate the kind of life lost. Here life is conceived of as joy, laughter, time in the form of days, and even all of creation as characterized by its transitory status (creation takes the form of a metaphorical possession as something that can be loaned).

Instead of giving it away, one can also be compelled to release life, as when the dragon is deprived of life, “ealdre bereafod” (2825b). Extending the idea of life as a possession, it can be endowed with exchange value to become something able to be bought or sold (*forgyldan*, *angyldan*, *gebicgan*). Referring to the Swedish wars, Beowulf explains that one Geat “ealdre gebohte” [“paid with his life”] (2481b), meaning that he died, but using life as a possession. Earlier, one of the Danes whom Grendel kills in Heorot “sare angeald / æfenræste” [“paid sorely for his evening rest”] (1251b-1252a). As a precious commodity, life makes sense used in this manner of economic compensation. In an interesting reversal, death can also be the medium of exchange: Beowulf pays for the dragon’s treasure, not with his life, but his death: “deaðe forgolden” (2843b). This gives weight to the idea that death itself is an object of value, as it aids in defining the reputation of the fallen warrior.¹⁴⁴ The idea of death as the loss of something precious, whether it is articulated as intentional or forced, leaves the victim incomplete, lacking an essential vital quality. This image of imperfection is unsettling because the splitting leaves a constant reminder of what is left behind, as opposed to departure, where absence

¹⁴⁴ See chapters 1 and 2 in Sutton for the effect of death scenes on a character.

can be “out of sight, out of mind” and thus easier to cope with. Instead, the loss of cohesion of the self leaves behind something which remains present as a memento of lost life, even lost control. Similarly, the poem itself is a present reminder of loss: *Beowulf* describes what is gone, but the act of description functions as a trace of what is lost—something great in the pre-Christian heroes, fame, treasure, and civilization.

The Dead of *Beowulf*

To move from a very broad look at *Beowulf*, let us now turn to several particular characters’ deaths for how the metaphors used can help guide our evaluation of them. Attention to individual deaths in the poem is not new—Gale Owen-Crocker devotes an entire monograph to the subject of the four funerals in *Beowulf*, adding the account from the Lay of the Last Survivor to the usual group of funerals for Scyld and Beowulf, and the one at Finnsburg. She argues: “There are many deaths in the poem and we are invited to react to them in different ways, favoring the killer in one case, the victim in another, but our interest is mostly in the circumstances of death, not in the fate of the body” (234). I share this interest in the circumstances of death, but from a point of view different from that of funeral trappings. In fact, I am interested in the fate of the body, as well as the fate the soul and the self. The conceptual metaphors involved in each death can also provide information that guides the audience’s reactions to these characters’ deaths (and consequently their lives).

Let us begin as the poem does, with Scyld’s death, which sets an elegiac tone for the rest of the poem. The poem opens with a brief story of the legendary Danish king’s discovery as a foundling, his rise to great power, his offspring, and his elaborate funeral. In the description of Scyld’s death and funeral, there are eight verbs which refer to him

dying or to the fate of his body in death. When the Danish king is himself the subject of a clause, the verb is always one of self-propelled movement—departure (26a), travel (27a), or turning (55b). When his retainers are the subject, then the verbs are transitive—laying down (34a), sending forth (45b), or giving his body to the ocean (49a). In one case the poem states that “men ne cunnon ... hwa þæm hlæste onfeng” [“men do not know who received that cargo”] (50b-52b). Even Scyld’s death embodies the ideal relationship between lord and retainers. The lord willingly acts and forges his course, but the retainers also bear some responsibility for his keeping. Above and beyond the will of the lord and the support of his people, though, there always remains some unknown force or agent who finally takes the last action. Men may send a king off in death, but someone else unknown must ultimately take over. Scyld is, as the poem states, a mighty king, but such a leader is always integrally involved with his people and with forces beyond his ken. This little capsule of death-language analysis shows what can be done by paying attention to how the language involved with an individual can guide our understanding of his character and of special themes in the poem. Scyld’s death illuminates and exemplifies the place of a king in the social network and in a more cosmological order.

The death of a less mythical, more historical king, though, is quite different in its metaphorical portrayal. While Scyld freely undertakes a journey with support from his people, Hygelac is buffeted about violently by the historical forces he is caught up in, and the variety of ways used to describe this experience reflect it. The Geatish king is taken away by fate (1205b) and spear (1846b); he is struck (2355b) and beaten (2359a); he bows (2918b), falls (1209b, 2919a), lies (2201b), and simply dies (2358b). Only once does Hygelac seem to have any control of his death, when “gehwearf þa in Francna

fæpm feorh cyninges” [“the life of the king turned into the Franks’ bosom”] (1210). Even here, though, the movement is only of a part of himself, his *feorh*, and it is immediately arrested by the embrace of his enemies. The poet never gives Hygelac the mythical dignity of Scyld, or much sense of agency in his own death. As the only known historically attested figure in the poem, Hygelac meets the same fate that the poem does, as its very intelligibility is consumed in the historical forces it attempts to communicate.¹⁴⁵

In addition to individuals, entire peoples reveal meaningful patterns in the death metaphors which describe their fates. The Danes, as they suffer under Grendel’s or Heremod’s sway, are portrayed as utterly hapless and powerless. The four nominal expressions which denote the death of Danes as a group are “morðbealu” [“murder-bale”] (136a), “wældeað” [“slaughter-death”] (695b), “wælfælle” [“slaughter-fall”] (1711b), and “deaðcwalum” [“death-kill”] (1712a). This language emphasizes the Danes’ dehumanization in bloody slaughter and their victimization as murdered men. The verbs throughout the poem for the Danes’ deaths mostly take them as passive patients of the killing action: they are taken by Grendel (122b), war (1123b), and death (488b, 695b); they are swept away by fate (477b); they fall (1042b, 1113b) and diminish (477a); and they are destroyed (1713a). To focus on the leader of the Danes as embodying the tribe, Hrothgar is only once mentioned as dying, though it too is a death of passive removal: “hine ylde benam” [“old age took him”] (1886b). Whereas Hygelac’s death conveys a sense of the chaos of history, the Danes as a people suffer a fate of removal—repeatedly

¹⁴⁵ Roy Liuzza, in the introduction to his translation of the poem explains, “we may feel that even the possibility of telling a true tale is called into question as the narrative weaves in and out of the complex history of Swedish/Geatish relations, the story coils around itself like a serpent, and the reader is lost in the narrative maze of a history that finally seems to consume even the Geats themselves” (37).

swept away from the scene of action. These deaths are more poignant, part of the poem's nostalgic elegy for a lost, unreclaimable past. The Danes and their hall are the most developed Germanic cultural system in the poem, yet *Beowulf* continually insists upon their obsolescence.

Moving from individuals and tribes, I now turn to all people, as the poem also speaks with the Old English gnomic voice of generality.¹⁴⁶ Often in *Beowulf* the speaker or some character will offer a gnomic statement about humanity; these frequently involve death. For all of the expressions involving the deaths of people in general (I count fifteen), the death is without a direct killer. Such wisdom is not concerned with how death occurs, only that it does—death is unavoidable. Nor, for those expressions constructed with verbs that mean “to die,” do any take an abstract killer like war, fate, or death itself as a killer. Instead it is the gnomic everyman subject which conducts the death. For example, in response to the Danes who fearfully turn to Satan after Grendel's predations, the speaker comments that “wel bið þæm þe mot / æfter deaðdæge drihten secean / ond to fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian” [“it is good for him who after his death-day can seek the Lord and desire peace in the Father's embrace”] (186b-88b). Here, the dying one is quite active as he seeks God and asks for His peace. Likewise, after Beowulf promises to fight or die as he faces the dragon, the speaker remarks, “swa sceal æghwylc mon / alætan lændagas” [“so must any man give up loaned-days”] (2590b-91a). Other cases involve verbs for sleeping and falling, which, though less intentional, still maintain the victim as the grammatical subject of the action of dying, however articulated. In the

¹⁴⁶ See Susan Deskis's *Beowulf and the Medieval Proverb Tradition* for an account of the proverbs which percolate to the surface of the poem.

advice that the poetic speaker, Hrothgar, or Beowulf gives the audience, death is always something to be actively performed, rather than something to be passively suffered. The tone when the poem directly addresses the audience thus provides a somewhat empowering countercurrent to the prevailing sense of powerlessness and loss elsewhere so dominant in the poem. This might clue us in to differences between the subject of the poem (the Germanic tribes of the past) and the audience of the poem (Anglo-Saxons living in a more optimistic age).

To return to one final individual death, Beowulf receives the greatest share of references to death. This fact may seem surprising because Beowulf is the hero of the poem, but he is the hero of an elegiac poem that we have already said is obsessed with loss. In any case, Beowulf's death, both hypothetical and real, is alluded to roughly sixty times, in both verbal and nominal expressions. A distant second in death references is Grendel, with about thirty. And about three quarters of the death allusions for Beowulf come in the last quarter of the poem; this is not surprising as the last part of the poem functions as one long build-up to his certain and actual death.¹⁴⁷ But Beowulf's death language is surprisingly balanced. Regarding the verbs for dying, there are from three to six each for Beowulf's life being passively taken (*niman* 441b, 447b, 1481b, 1491b, 2536b; *lædan* 3177b), Beowulf being violently attacked (*gesceþþan* 1447b; *ofslean* 3060b; *oferswyðan* 1768b; *abreotan* 1599b), Beowulf falling (*cringan* 635b; *gesigan* 2659a, *hreosan* 3179a) or lying (*licgan* 2851b), Beowulf actively moving away (*forsiðian* 1550a; *geferan* 2844b, 3063b; *gewitan* 2819b), Beowulf releasing his life (*alætan* 2750b;

¹⁴⁷ For a thorough analysis of this death scene, see Sutton 50-62. He argues with George Clark that "the Christian poet celebrates Beowulf's adherence to the heroic ideal" (62) in his death.

linnan 1478a; *alecgan* 3020b), and Beowulf being separated in some manner (*gedælan* 2422b, 3068a; *sceacan* 2742b; *getwæfan* 1763b).

This pattern does not lend itself to making any simple claims about the poem guiding the audience to a particular reaction to the character. Beowulf is not overwhelmingly passive, as the Danes are. He is not overwhelmingly victimized as Hygelac is. Nor is Beowulf significantly ennobled with agency as Scyld is, or implicated in a powerful sense of loss as the poem as a whole is. Perhaps this ambivalence is the point, though. There is much critical debate over *Beowulf's* attitude towards its own hero at the end of the poem with the ambiguous lines proclaiming Beowulf's soul seeking "soðfæstra dom" ["judgment of the truth-fast"] (2820b) in death, and Beowulf being "lofgeornost" ["most eager for praise"] (3182b) of all heroes. What kind of judgment his soul seeks and what kind of glory he yearned for are not clear—is this commendation or condemnation?¹⁴⁸ My reading of the balance of allusions to Beowulf's death supports a meaningfully ambiguous evaluation of the hero. The poem seems to be as undecided about the hero and the past as modern readers are—at once critical of and nostalgic for the past. I am certain of one thing—Beowulf's death is not neutral; there is only one simple verb meaning to die used in the whole poem for Beowulf (*sweltan* 3037b). Beowulf's death is not nothing, rather it is everything; it is all of the types of death noted above; it is the embodiment of a poem that tries to have it all. Both Beowulf and *Beowulf* are not simply canceled out by contradictory attitudes, but energized by competing interpretations that amount to the sum of all their dynamic powers.

¹⁴⁸ The judgment and praise could be from approval from God and Christ-worthy, or they could be unchristian and worldly. This debate is covered well in Clark, "The Hero and the Theme" (especially 279-280, 283-285) and "*Beowulf*: The Last Word."

Death as Choice: Empowering Heroes and Saints

Among the great variety of metaphors for death in *Beowulf*, most expressing loss, frenzy, weakness, or ambivalence, as we have just seen, there are a few isolated expressions which emerge as unusual in the greater context of the poem. One, the idea of fate or death meeting Beowulf, supports the ambiguity I have just asserted in the previous section. Thus fate is described as seeking Beowulf's life: "wyrð ungemete neah, / se ðone gomelan gretan sceolde, / secean sawle hord" ["fate, very near, must meet the old man, seek his soul hoard"] (2420b-26a). Beowulf seems the passive victim of numinal forces here, but his soul also actively seeks death, as judgment: "him of hreðre gewat / sawol secean soðfæstra dom" ["from his breast departed the soul to seek judgment of the truth-fast"] (2819b-20b). These cases of the soul meeting death are balanced in their agency—the soul once being passively met and once actively seeking. The idea of seeking death (or judgment) is a challenging notion. To seek out, search for, or ask for death implies intention and will behind the act of dying. This position asserts power in the face of what is usually understood as alienating, as we have seen many disempowering deaths in *Beowulf* and other Old English poetry.

In a further expression of this empowering idea, Beowulf is even once said to choose death. This suggests a different metaphor for death, one which results from considering events, like death, to be actions—DEATH IS A CHOICE.¹⁴⁹ I call this a metaphor as a particular version of the generic-level metaphor EVENTS ARE ACTIONS. Consequently,

¹⁴⁹ The DOE gives as a sense for *ceosan* an explanation of this metaphorical idea: "in poetry, in circumlocutions for the death of a good man or the death of the body as distinct from the soul, with various implications depending on what is said to be chosen (e.g. another or better light or life, grave, the fire of a funeral pyre)" (1.a.i). And for *geceosan*, the DOE offers a very similar explanation: "in poetry, in circumlocutions for the death of a good man, with various implications depending on what is said to be chosen (e.g. another or better light or life, a resting place on the battlefield)" (1.a.i).

death receives an agent and a specific modal thrust. To choose death, rather than passively suffer it, is a supremely empowering move, which could break the impasse of Beowulf's ambivalent death. Right after Beowulf utters his last words to Wiglaf, the poem states that "he bæl cure" ["he chose fire"] (2818b). Fire here must stand for death as a method of dealing with the body after decease. Despite all the explanations of fate taking Beowulf or the dragon killing him, Beowulf is still able to choose his death. In a literal sense, of course, he does choose to fulfill his duty as king and fight the dragon. But I think the line in question is more generally about Beowulf's character than simply a reassurance that, in following his duties, he happens to die. Rather, Beowulf is that special kind of person who can control his destiny, and therefore choose his death. Beowulf's ability to choose is what sets him apart from others in the poem.¹⁵⁰

Interestingly, Beowulf is not the only one in the poem to be given the power of choice in death—Hrethel is another. Before the battle with the dragon, Beowulf reflects on the story of his grandfather, the Geatish king Hrethel, who died following the accidental killing of one of his sons by another son. The very picture of grief and impotence, Hrethel could do nothing, caught between an obligation to avenge the death and loyalty to his other son as kin. Without any external cause, Hrethel just dies:

He ða mid þære sorhge, þe him swa sar belamp,
gumdream ofgeaf, godes leoht **geceas**,
eaferum læfde, swa deð eadig mon,
lond ond leodbyrig, þa he of life gewat. (2468-71)

¹⁵⁰ One counterargument to this claim is that the expression in question carries the ironic undertone so common in Old English poetry. This would suggest that Beowulf's death is absolutely not a choice, but violently imposed from the outside as Beowulf is as subject to fate as any in this lost world.

[Then he, with the sorrow which so sorely happened to him, gave up joy among men, **chose** God's light, left to his children, as a happy man does, land and town, when he departed from life.]

We see familiar expressions of death in these lines: giving up a joy and departing from life are fairly standard across the poetry and in *Beowulf*. But death here is also *choosing* God's light. As we saw in *The Fates of the Apostles*, light is a way to denote death, via conceptualizations of heaven as a place of eternal life and light. But how exactly does Hrethel die? In the absence of any physical or even abstract killer, he simply chooses to die. For a man deprived of all power of earthly action to resolve the conflict he is mired in, Hrethel asserts the only ability remaining to him. In this compelling image of grief, the sufferer still manages to hold on to his dignity through the way he dies. Though this is not a glorious death in battle, the language of choice tells us that Hrethel's death is under his own control.

One other possible instance of death as choice occurs in *Beowulf*. When Beowulf receives gifts after his killing of Grendel, we hear of a famous necklace stolen by a legendary Gothic warrior, Hama. The poem states that Hama finally, "geceas ecne ræd" ["chose eternal counsel"] (1201b), which could be an allusion to death, as indicated by the eternal nature of the wisdom he chose.¹⁵¹ Since this death is conjectural, it is less easy to determine the effect of the phrase on judging a character so obscure as Hama. It does suggest, though, that this Goth may have been worthy of a high reputation if he were one to choose his own death.

¹⁵¹ Other scholars suggest the phrase means that he entered a monastery, for example, Roberta Frank ("Germanic Legend in Old English Literature" 104).

Earlier in this chapter, I glossed over a couple of examples of this kind of willed death in *The Fates of the Apostles*. Now is the time to give them their due weight. Andrew's death, as a reminder, was characterized as a choice for "long eternal life, unending light" (19b-20b). There is the choice metaphor for death as the action of dying is conveyed by the verb, *geceosan*. To call his death a choice can certainly mean that Andrew willingly and intentionally faced or welcomed his death, as in expectation of martyrdom.¹⁵² But to say Andrew chose death, as a euphemistic way of saying he died, allows Andrew to be the agent of his own death, in ways beyond just expecting to martyr himself. While Andrew chose (*geceosan*) his death, John, Phillip, Simon, and Thaddeus each sought (*gesecan*) theirs.¹⁵³ Both are actions of an agent and therefore demonstrate the DEATH IS AN ACTION and DEATH IS A CHOICE metaphors. Death as an intentional choice, either with the verb (*ge*)*ceasan* or (*ge*)*secan*, occurs five times in the poem. In addition to great kings, saints are empowered by the ability to will their own deaths.

This death as a choice metaphor occurs a few times elsewhere in the corpus. In the Chronicle poem *The Death of Edgar* (from the entry for the year 975), one of the ways in which the king is described as dying is with a choice: "Eadgar, Engla cyning, ceas him oðer leoht" ["Edgar, king of the English, chose another light for himself"] (2). This other light which Edgar chooses, based on the metaphors we have seen, must be God's or heaven's light, and the phrase certainly means that he died. But this way of

¹⁵² At the end of the Old English *Andreas*, based on the 4th century Greek *Acts of Andrew and Matthew in the Country of the Cannibals*, the apostle sets out to Achaia "þær he sawulgedal, / beaducwealm gebad" ["where he awaited soul-parting, war death"] (1701b-1702a). This poem implies a self-willed martyrdom, supporting the choice Andrew makes in *The Fates of the Apostles*.

¹⁵³ Nicholas Howe claims that "Cynewulf uses 'gesohte' as a periphrasis for 'died'" (*Catalogue* 94), but I maintain that there is more to it as to why this particular euphemism for death is used in the poem.

dying, choosing this other light, places the king in the company of heroes like Beowulf and saints like Andrew. Edgar is thus ennobled and empowered by his intentional choice of death. He is not only worthy of receiving poetic treatment of his death in the Chronicle record, but also of this highest manner of death.

In *The Battle of Maldon*, the English warriors Wulfmær and Offa, “wælræste geceas” [“he chose slaughter-rest”] (113b), and “grund gesohte” [“sought the ground”] (287b), respectively. These loyal thanes of Byrhtnoth, in sharp contrast to the fleeing cowards and the heathen Vikings, get to choose their deaths willingly. This method of dying grants great power and honor to these warriors who, though they die in a losing effort, remain proper heroes. No doubt the poet reached into tradition to glorify their deaths, just as he did to characterize the anachronistic *comitatus* of Byrhtnoth’s warrior band. I will return in the next section to give a much more thorough treatment of death in *The Battle of Maldon*.

In the last section of *The Rune Poem*,¹⁵⁴ the body chooses the earth in cold death: “flæsc onginneþ / hraw colian, hrusan ceosan / blac to gebeddan” [“flesh begins to cool as a corpse, choose the ground, bleak as a bedfellow”] (91b-93a). In choosing the ground, the body chooses death (via the DEATH IS DOWN metaphor). Why this particular death should be expressed with the choice verb is not clear. The poem it comes from is a form of wisdom literature as it defines with gnomic description the meanings of each element in the runic alphabet. The final rune of the poem (though not last in the alphabet) is *ear*, which means something like “earth” or “clay,” but possibly “death” (DOE). Perhaps the sapiential quality of this death lends it the weight to be given the choice of death—it is

¹⁵⁴ This 94-line poem exists only in a 1705 transcript as the original was destroyed in the Cotton fire.

saintly and heroic for one body as the representation of all bodies to die in the earth. Or maybe there is no special significance—the expression is merely conventional as a way to indicate death.

One other possible instance of this choice metaphor comes from the short didactic poem *An Exhortation to Christian Living*. Near its end, the speaker tells the audience that they need to change the way they live on earth if they want a heavenly reward: “gif þu wilt þa upplican eardwic ceosan” [“if you wish to choose the celestial dwelling”] (78). This expression, however, is not a euphemism for dying, but rather a very particular kind of choice that one can make in order to achieve the kind of death that should be desired. Similarly, in *Soul and Body I*, the soul laments to the body, “þæt þu æfre þus laðlic legerbed cure” [“that you should always choose this loathly death-bed”] (155). The choice of this particular death seems to be the important part, not that death is itself a choice. But, aside from these two more literal examples, to characterize death as a choice is usually a special move that seems designed to empower specific individuals who die.

Downward Death: *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Battle of Maldon*

We move now from the relatively mythical adventures of heroes and saints to the more historical world of battle poetry. There are a number of poems in Old English that focus on battles that are historically attested. Among the real battles portrayed in the poetry, several are corroborated by the historical record involving the Anglo-Saxons or other Germanic peoples. The Battle of Maldon is recounted in a poem from the *Liber Eliensis*, while several other battles appear poetically in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, including, most famously, The Battle of Brunanburh. Though they employ the usual variety of terms, metaphors, and motifs for death, these poems exhibit a particular

language of death, favoring some metaphors, while minimalizing others, to achieve specific effects.

Let us begin with *The Battle of Brunanburh*, a short poetic entry for the year 937 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.¹⁵⁵ The poem recounts the victories of Æthelstan and Eadmund, grandchildren of Alfred the Great, as they work to reclaim the country from the Vikings. They fight at Brunanburh, a place not identified with absolute certainty, but probably in the northwest between Scotland and Chester. The Anglo-Saxon nobles were opposed by the Scots, Vikings from Dublin, and the Strathclyde Welsh, all of whom they routed in a glorious victory. The poem, infused with elements of traditional heroic language (kennings, beasts of battle motif, etc.), is primarily concerned with the political implications of the battle, focusing on the two noble Anglo-Saxon victors, and, especially, the retreating enemies. As Fulk and Cain note, “it is unconcerned with individual battles and heroic speeches” (223), unlike similar battle poems, including *Maldon*. The account even places this battle in a historical context, proclaiming that this much blood has not been spent since the invasions of the fifth century, which are celebrated.

The death language of *Brunanburh* is not as highly concentrated as in a poem like *The Battle of Maldon*, as we shall soon see. Deaths in this battle are related in a way to emphasize their physical impact, not their spiritual importance. Five times, groups of generic warriors (never individuals) for either side are noted as falling (*feallan*) or being felled (*gefyllan*).¹⁵⁶ Twice combatants are noted as lying (*licgan*), and there is one brief

¹⁵⁵ This developed account appears in four versions of the *Chronicle*, according to Greenfield and Calder (148) and Fulk and Cain (223).

¹⁵⁶ At lines 10, 12, 41, and 67.

description of someone being taken away in death: many a man lay “garum ageted” [“taken away by spears”] (18a). Though the bodies lay there physically dead, they are also said to be taken away, which suggests the presence of a life possession or essence, now removed. And once the DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor is invoked: the five kings lay “sweordum aswefede” [“put to sleep by swords”] (30a). Additionally, three fairly direct verbs indicating fatal violence appear to communicate death: “heawan” [“cut down”] (23a), “beslagen” [“struck”] (42a), and “forgrunden” [“ground down”] (43b). This distribution of ways to indicate death shows the poem to be a fairly straightforward battle poem, with a high preponderance of verbs communicating violent attack and the physical effects of dying. The one example of sleep seems a poetic embellishment made possible by the conceptual metaphor. *The Battle of Brunanburh* will serve us as a baseline for how Old English battle poems conceive of death.

The Battle of Maldon is a much more developed poetic treatment of a battle, with a more telling pattern of death metaphors. This poem commemorates a battle in 991 between the Anglo-Saxons and a band of Vikings.¹⁵⁷ The Anglo-Saxons, under the leadership of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex, suffered a defeat to the Vikings at Maldon, a town on the southern Essex coast. These were years of raids and payments of tributes, with the battle at Maldon initiating Æthelred’s unpopular appeasement policy.¹⁵⁸ The poem celebrates the noble, glorious deaths of the doomed Englishmen, featuring uplifting

¹⁵⁷ The poem is a fragment of 325 lines with the beginning and end missing, though scholars doubt much is lost (for example: Scragg, *The Battle of Maldon* 4). It survives only in a modern copy, the original having been lost in the Cotton fire of 1731.

¹⁵⁸ Fulk and Cain claim that the poem “is concerned with none of these issues” (220), a judgment I will attempt to challenge.

speeches promoting the values of *comitatus* and loyalty to the point of death.¹⁵⁹ It begins with Byrhtnoth arranging his troops on the near side of the Panta River, opposed to the Viking army camped on an island in the river. A messenger calls for the English to surrender and pay tribute to avoid bloodshed, but Byrhtnoth responds that they will pay only in spears. A stalemate ensues, as the Vikings can only advance along a narrow tidal causeway. Perhaps through cunning (*lytegian*)¹⁶⁰ on the part of the Vikings, and excessive pride (*ofermod*) on the part of Byrhtnoth,¹⁶¹ the ealdorman allows the Vikings to cross so they can fight freely. After the first skirmishes, Byrhtnoth is mortally wounded, though he manages to kill his attacker and another Viking before he dies. After Byrhtnoth's death, his retainers make speeches of loyalty and continue to fight, though some flee the battle in cowardice. Many specific Anglo-Saxon warriors are named throughout the course of the poem, while no Vikings are, giving the poem a very nationalistic tone.¹⁶²

Unsurprisingly, *The Battle of Maldon* includes quite a number of deaths, but what is interesting is the distribution of terms and metaphors which express these deaths—the acts of killing, the process of dying, and the states of bodies in death. Only a handful of

¹⁵⁹ These values were likely ritualistic survivals more than actual contemporary practices: “Though by the late tenth century, or early eleventh, ealdormen like Byrhtnoth certainly did not live in the manner of earlier tribal chieftains, an English poet could still find the old ethos and mode worth incorporating into a traditional verse narrative to make a historical defeat into a poetic victory” (Greenfield and Calder 153).

¹⁶⁰ The meaning of the word *lytegian* has been debated—for a fully philological discussion, see Cross, “Mainly” (236-242). James Earl convincingly argues for a neutral meaning for a term derived from Latin *litigare* (“‘The Battle of Maldon,’ line 86”).

¹⁶¹ Whether or not the poem endorses or critiques this pride has been a hot topic of debate: see Helmut Gneuss, “*Maldon* 89” and Paul Cavill.

¹⁶² Though some scholars (Greenfield, *Studies*; Cross; Scattergood) argue that the poem is a piece of propaganda indicting the king, Æthelred, for his appeasement of the Vikings, with ironic appeals to his name, John Niles (“*Maldon*”) view the poem as supporting these policies, for if even a great warrior like Byrhtnoth cannot defeat the ruthless Viking, what good is it to resist?

specific people are reported by the speaker to die in the poem, while many other deaths are alluded to, either by the poetic speaker or some of the speaking characters. There are relatively few direct statements of death, and by “direct statements” I mean those which use verbs in more or less literal ways. I count eleven occurrences of verbs that can mean “to kill” (and even many of these have a clear physical basis), and only one which means “to die.” Instead, the vast majority of deaths in the poem are communicated through conceptual metaphor. Counting by instances of such verbs, seven convey the giving or taking of life, and a couple each involve choice and travel. But the most common way this is done is through a verb indicating downward motion or position: fourteen involve lying down: all but one a form of *licgan*,¹⁶³ and twelve involve falling down (*feollan* and *cringan*). Placing these “down” verbs in high relief is another seventeen instances of contrasting verbs for standing (*standan*). I will next give a run-down of each of these types of deaths in their contexts, then open the question of what effect this particular weighted mix of verbs can have.

The direct statements of death I have just mentioned are mostly verbs meaning “to kill.” *Spillan* (34a), meaning most properly “to destroy” (BT), appears early as the Viking messenger expresses that they have no need to kill, if terms are met. *Slean*, “to strike” (BT), occurs three times to communicate death: Eadweard strikes one Viking who falls dead (117), Byrhtnoth strikes another, though we are not told that this Viking dies (163), and Offa strikes another Viking to death (285). Once, we are told that Wulfstan is “ofsceat” [“shot”] with a spear (77). The verb *ofsceotan* combines the prefix *of-* (which gives the force of killing) with the root verb *sceotan* (“to shoot”) to mean something like

¹⁶³ The other is *hynan*, which works a little differently, as I will explain shortly.

“killed by shooting.” Finally, a form of *heawan* or *forheawan*, “to hew, cut, strike” (BT), with the *for-* prefix a negative intensifier, appears six times in the poem.¹⁶⁴ Though I said that these verbs for killing (*spillan*, *slean*, *ofsceotan*, and *heawan*) are direct, non-metaphorical ways to convey death, that is not completely accurate. Note that each one has a primary meaning other than “to kill”: “to destroy,” “to strike,” “to shoot,” and “to cut,” respectively. These are instances of verbs which express the physical action which brings about death, though the actions are not necessarily always fatal (with the possible exception of *spillan*). Thus, even in the not fully metaphorical expressions, there is still some figural slippage of synecdoche employed to represent killing. These are examples of what I meant when I mentioned how the cause of death could stand in for death. The exception to these verbs of killing, and the only time a non-metaphorical verb used to mean “to die” in the whole poem, is *sweltan*. Late in the poem, we are told that earlier Offa had promised his lord they would either ride home together whole or “on wælstowe wundum sweltan” [“in the slaughter-place die from wounds”] (293). As we are about to see, every other mention of dying is brought about through fully metaphorical means.

Among the less used metaphorical expressions for death in *The Battle of Maldon* are two instances each for DEATH IS A CHOICE and DEATH IS DEPARTURE. Of the Anglo-Saxon warrior Wulfmar, the poem states, “wælræste geceas” [“he chose slaughter-rest”] (113b), and of his compatriot Offa, “grund gesohte” [“sought the ground”] (287b). These two warriors receive the empowering treatment of choosing or seeking their own deaths.¹⁶⁵ What they choose, however, is slaughter-rest and the ground, places that evoke

¹⁶⁴ In lines 115, 181, 223, 288, 314, and 324.

¹⁶⁵ See the section in this chapter, “Death as a Choice: Heroes and Saints,” for a discussion of the motives and effects of this metaphorical characterization.

death, for reasons associated with a DEATH IS DOWN metaphor, which I will return to in a moment. No Viking warrants this kind of treatment in the poem. Byrhtnoth, though, merits a special metaphor for death when he prays that his soul might travel safely to God:

Nu ic ah, milde Metod, mæste þearfe
þæt þu minum gaste godes geunne
þæt min sawul to ðe siðian mote
on þin geweald, þeoden engla,
mid friþe feran. (176a-79a)

[Now I have, mild Measurer, greatest need that you grant to my spirit the
favor that my soul might journey to you into your power, ruler of angels,
to travel with peace.]

The verbs *siðian* and *feran*, each means “to journey, to travel,” as Byrhtnoth desires that his soul make a journey to God and into His power. As we have seen, this journey motif evokes the metaphors involving life as a journey and death as a destination, or death itself as a departure from this present life here. No other soul in this poem is described as making this kind of journey, so Byrhtnoth’s death gains a special status with this poetic prayer. This episode has even been identified as participating in the *judicium particulare* tradition of a death-struggle between the angels and demons for possession of the soul after death.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Morton Bloomfield advances this notion to support a martyrdom for Byrhtnoth, though Fred Robinson argues that it in fact supports the opposite idea, “subtly de-Christianiz[ing] the cosmic setting of *Maldon* (“God” 428). Robinson provides a great many examples on a popular death-struggle tradition in Old English literature in his essay.

A more common metaphor for death, in this poem as in the corpus, treats life as a possession, which signifies death when lost. A number of expressions here reflect this conceptual system, all using verbs which take as their objects either life, death, or the person dying. Before the battle properly begins, the poem explains that no one could hurt each other, “buton hwa þurh flanes flyht fyl gename” [“except who takes a fall through an arrow’s flight”] (71). To take a fall sounds familiar now, but literally does not work: for something to be taken, it must be a physical object. I suggest that the fall here stands for death, as evidenced by the abundant language of falling which I will examine in a moment, while the taking of the fall of death reflects an idea of death as an object to be possessed. Just as to be alive means having a possession life, so too can dying mean taking death as a possession. In other cases, what is taken away is the person himself. Thus, after his speech of loyalty, Ælfwine kills a Viking who is “forwegen mid his wæpne” [“carried away with his weapon”] (228a). The Viking, of course, remains there on the ground, as emphasized by the previous line, so his being carried away only makes sense with the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor, though here the slain Viking requires a metaphorical agent to carry him off (the weapon), demonstrating a less completely saturated metaphorical deployment. He is dead enough to not be able to move himself, but can still depart in that metaphorical death if carried. In the same manner, Leofsunu vows that he will not abandon his fallen lord, “ac me sceal wæpen niman” [“but a weapon must take me”] (252b). In several other moments, it is life that is taken away to signal death, as in the common metaphor LIFE IS A POSSESSION. Thus the young warriors think who might “gewinnan” [“obtain by fighting”] (125) a life with a spear from a doomed man; life is reached by Byrhtnoth or given by a Viking (“geræhte”) (142), given

(“gesealdon”) by Alfnoth and Wulfmar (184), or wished to let go (“forlætan”) by loyal retainers (208). In each case, and whatever the verb, life (*lif* or *feorh*) is a possession whose release, given or taken, signifies the death of the former possessor. Therefore that possession life is to be protected or risked, as indeed is expressed a couple of times in the poem: the fleeing cowards “hyra feore burgon” [“saved their lives”] (194b) by retreating into the woods, and by contrast the loyal retainers “feores hi ne rohton” [“they did not care for their lives”] (260b).

Thus far the expressions for death in *The Battle of Maldon* that we have seen involve violence, departure, choice, and loss; but the vast majority of verbs used in to communicate the action or state of dying, however, involves the downward motion of falling or the downward position of lying. The verb *feallan* appears eight times in the poem, in various inflected forms.¹⁶⁷ It occurs twice in the infinitive, both times as the object of the modal of necessity, *sculan*. First, in addressing the Viking messenger who has come to demand tribute, Byrhtnoth responds that “feallan sceolon / hæpene æt hilde” [“they must fall, heathens at battle”] (54b-55a). And the second time, the speaker comments, as battle draws near, that “wæs seo tid cumen / þæt þær fæge men feallan sceoldon” [“the time was come that there the fated men must fall”] (53b-54b). Both of these claims indicate the necessity of falling in death in the battle to come, whether heathen Viking, or fated men (who could be either Viking or Anglo-Saxon, or both). Those warriors fated to die by definition must die, but the poem asserts the necessity of the manner of death as well, specifically through falling down. All of the other instances of *feallan* are put in the past, which is as irrevocable as a preordained future. Those who

¹⁶⁷ In lines 54, 105, 111, 119, 126, 202, 286, 303.

fall are often just unidentified warriors: “beornas feollon” [“men fell”] (111b), “wæl feol on eorðan” [“slaughter fell on the earth”] (126b, 303b). Unnamed Viking warriors fall too: Edward slew one “þæt him æt fotum feoll” [“so that he fell at his feet”] (119a), and Offa slew a seafarer “þæt he on eorðan¹⁶⁸ feoll” [“so that he fell on the earth”] (286b). The hero of the poem, Byrhtnoth, stands out a little as his falling occurs in a past participle: “Þa wearð afeallen þæs folces ealdor” [“then that people’s leader became fallen”] (202). Extending the linguistic expression of this falling action with the auxiliary “wearð” changes the tone of this death: Byrhtnoth does not merely fall, as many others do, he *becomes* fallen, which adds a touch of necessity and dignity as it elides the actual process of falling in favor of reporting that he achieves the state of being fallen.

Some form of the verb *cringan* appears four times in the poem.¹⁶⁹ This verb means “to fall, perish, die” (DOE 1) and “to fall in battle, die by violence” (1.a). Uniting all of these senses is, I think, some physical action of shifting down, so the verb gives a consistent sense of the downward motion I have been discussing. Byrhtnoth gets another reference to a falling death, described this time by Leofsunu as he vows to fight on, “nu min wine gecranc” [“now that my lord has fallen”] (250b). Offa recounts his earlier vow that he would either return home with his lord, “oððe on here crincgan” [“or fall with the army”] (292b). In the final fight of the poem, the speaker states that “wigend cruncon” [“warriors fell”] (302b), and how Godric killed many a Viking “oð þæt he on hilde gecranc” [“until he fell in battle”] (324b). These verbs, also in the past tense or an infinitive with a modal, cluster at the end of the poem and usually refer to the Anglo-

¹⁶⁸ I will note that many of these instances of falling include a locative phrase, usually “on the earth,” but also “at his feet.” These further emphasize the downward placement of the dying and dead warriors.

¹⁶⁹ At lines 250, 292, 302, 324.

Saxons (though the subject in line 302 remains ambiguous). With either verb, *feallan* or *cringan*, death by falling has happened or must happen, lending an air of absolute necessity or irresistible fate to *The Battle of Maldon*.

The result of falling is, of course, lying down in a prone position, and thirteen times in the poem warriors are described as lying down with the verb *licgan*.¹⁷⁰ The distribution is a little different from that of the falling verbs just examined—lying appears in mostly in the past tense (nine times), but also three times in the present and once in the infinitive. Lying applies most often to the Anglo-Saxons, with only one reference to a lying Viking: Ælfwine wounds one of the sea-men, “þæt se on foldan læg” [“so that he lay on the ground”] (227b). One other reference to lying is indeterminate: “hyssas lagon” [“young men lay”] (112b). But I suspect this line refers to the Anglo-Saxons, as some of them are elsewhere characterized as young, and at this point the poem moves from a very general description of the battle to the specific Anglo-Saxons involved. The rest of the instances of *licgan* communicate the state of death for specific English warriors who lie in death: Wulfmar (157), Ælfnoth and Wulmær (183), Eadweard (279, 294), Wistan (300), and Byrhtwold (319). This last mention of lying comes as Byrhtwold states that he “be swa leofan men licgan þence” [“by such a beloved man, intends to lie”] (319). He refers, of course, to Byrhtnoth, whose death is the center of the poem, as it accounts for the five remaining occurrences of the *licgan* verb which signal death.¹⁷¹ Most of these

¹⁷⁰ The verb occurs in lines 112, 157, 183, 204, 222, 227, 232, 276, 279, 294, 300, 314, 319. One other verb that could indicate lying is *hynan*, which occurs in line 324 as Godric fights the Vikings and is said to “hynde.” Bosworth-Toller gives a long list of senses for the verb *hynan*: “To abuse, humiliate, rebuke, correct, treat with insult or contumely, despise, oppress, afflict, ill-treat, bring or lay low, subject.” A number of these suggest a physical or figurative forced movement of something to a lower position, hence I include it here as verb meaning loosely “to make low.”

¹⁷¹ These occur at lines 204, 222, 232, 276, 314.

references are spoken by Byrhtnoth's warriors as they rally around his death to fight on. The retainers' attention is continually drawn to the body of Byrhtnoth lying on the ground, as motivation for the warriors to fight on. But the audience's attention is also repeatedly focused on this lying body, perhaps in a rhetorical move of glorification. To say that a dead body lying on the ground is glorified seems strange, but I feel with our attention so focused there, bolstered by the words of loyalty and praise for the fallen hero, we cannot help but feel the cognitive dissonance of seeing Byrhtnoth down dead, but continually upheld in the consciousness of the characters and audience of the poem. This dissonance reaffirms Byrhtnoth's worthiness of being remembered, as the memory tends to retain surprising or unexpected images. Here the startling image is of the great leader Byrhtnoth lying dead in a battle in which he had held the advantage. The focus on those lying down dead suggests that though they have been killed, they will not be forgotten. For it is primarily the English fighters who receive the enduring presence and memory signified by the lying on the ground. This is, after all, their land, and the English occupy it even in death. Despite the historically persisting presence of the Vikings in England, they are unnamed in the poem, as if to dispatch these interlopers in the only ways available to the Anglo-Saxons—linguistically and poetically.

Falling and lying account for some twenty-six verbs in *The Battle of Maldon* that point to death or dying. Furthermore, some corresponding language appears in the poem which exploits this conceptual system, calling attention to vertical orientation. As I have noted, many of the deaths also emphasize the location of the falling or lying as on the surface of the earth. The conventional "on eorðan" occurs as a locative prepositional phrase with *feallan* three times (126, 286, 303) and with *licgan* twice (157, 232-33). The

phrases “on foldan” (227) and “on greote” (314-15) also point to the earth as the place of falling or lying warriors. Furthermore, feet are alluded to several times in the poem, another way to indicate the low position of a dead warrior: Byrhtnoth “ne mihte þa on fotum leng fæste gestandan” [“could not then stand securely on his feet long”] (171). Leofsunu vows that he will not “fleon fotes trym” [“flee a footstep”] (247a) from battle. And likewise Eadweard promises “þæt he nolde fleogan fotmæl landes” [“that he would not flee a foot-measure of land”] (275) from the fallen lord. The image created by these references to feet is interesting because it looks two ways— on the one hand, down to the ground and motionlessness (death), and on the other, to the possibility of movement and action (life). Thus the feet passages in the poem again draw our attention downward, but also suggest the power to remain standing upright. For Byrhtnoth the feet show what he can no longer do—stand and fight. For Leofsunu and Eadweard by contrast, the feet show their resolve to remain standing in defense of their dead lord.

Standing is itself a huge part of *The Battle of Maldon*, with seventeen versions of the verb *standan* occurring in the text. Most of these describe Byrhtnoth and his men— Byrhtnoth arranges or orders his men to stand in a certain manner (19, 63), Byrhtnoth himself stands his ground or is unable to (28, 51, 100, 171), and the Anglo-Saxon warriors stand firm, either collectively or individually (79, 100, 122, 127, 152, 182, 273). A couple of times, the text just reports that both sides, or warriors generically stand (68, 301). The Vikings only merit two occasions of standing (25, 72), which serves as a commentary on their value and worthiness. And once, an inanimate object is characterized as standing—a spear thrown by Byrhtnoth stands in the body of an enemy fighter: “him æt heortan stod ætterne ord” [“in his heart stood a poisonous spear”] (145b-

46a). All of this standing stresses the resolute nature of the Anglo-Saxon warriors engaging in battle (notwithstanding those who flee upon Byrhtnoth's death). Though they are defeated the English stood firm, a value the poem repeatedly emphasizes with its language. But standing also exists in sharp contrast to all of the falling and lying described earlier, and is also disproportionally Anglo-Saxon.¹⁷²

So, what conclusions can we draw about the distribution of metaphors and terms for death in *The Battle of Maldon*? What does it mean that DEATH IS DOWN appears some twenty-five times in the poem, while LIFE IS A POSSESSION comes up nine times, DEATH IS DEPARTURE two to four times, and DEATH IS A CHOICE only twice. Why no explicit treatment of death as eternal life or as a glorious heavenly home, as occurs in other Old English poems? What does it mean for there to be only one literal verb meaning "to die" in the whole poem? The very particular way death is treated in the poem contributes to the rhetorical purpose of *The Battle of Maldon*. To answer the above questions in reverse, I would say that there is so much metaphorical treatment of death in the poem in order to insist that death is meaningful. Different metaphors pick out different aspect of that meaning for different purposes.

There is not much recourse to heavenly rewards in *The Battle of Maldon* because it is just not very concerned with the personal journey of life or with the individual salvation of the soul. In Fred Robinson's words, "the dying soldiers do not seem to be Christian martyrs on the threshold of paradise but valiant warriors enacting a grim and terribly meaningful heroic sacrifice for heroic ideals" ("God" 426). Thus the poem is

¹⁷² No doubt this Anglo-Saxon focus is just part of the general propaganda of the piece—Vikings have no names, few speeches, stand little, and even fall and lie less. This attests to the skill with which the poet was able to craft a poem celebrating the losers of a great battle.

much more concerned with the effect of behavior here in this life, and with the values of *comitatus*, which can conflict with Christian values.¹⁷³ The great exception, as we have seen, is Byrhtnoth's prayer upon his mortal wounding, in which he begs God for his soul's safe passage to heaven. Byrhtnoth no doubt warrants this special treatment as revered ealdorman to the Anglo-Saxons involved. The special treatment of his death makes him stand out all the more.¹⁷⁴ Nor is the poem very interested in the individually empowering gesture of death as a choice, which we see more with secular heroes like Beowulf or with sainted martyrs like the apostles. Because the audience of the poem would know the battle at Maldon to be futile (because it already happened!), choice is less important here, though this lack of choice could be surprising if, as has been argued, the poem is all about a choice—fight or appease the Vikings,¹⁷⁵ who continue in a series of raids and ongoing campaigns.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps the poem does participate in the political debate around the policies of Æthelred,¹⁷⁷ by presenting death as not much of a choice at all: no warrior, not even Byrhtnoth can avoid death, if they resist the Vikings.

¹⁷³ Robinson explains further, "*Maldon* was written out of a culture whose fundamental assumptions about God and death were incompatible with a heroic sense of life" ("God" 425). Though I will add that the literature certainly can combine these ideals, as Christ in the poetry behaves like a secular heroic lord who demands allegiance.

¹⁷⁴ Some even argue that the poem is hagiographic (Blake), though others disagree (Scragg, *Battle*). Robinson takes Byrhtnoth's death as a type for the English warriors dying in the battle ("God" 427). I disagree because, though he shares other language of death with the retainers (falling, lying, etc.), there is no other connection in terms this special, Christian death.

¹⁷⁵ John Niles argues that "the poem orients the first part of the narrative around a pressing pragmatic question: how should the English nation respond to the threat posed by an aggressive army of Vikings, by offering fight or tribute?" ("Maldon" 448).

¹⁷⁶ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 991 and those surrounding alludes to numerous attacks.

¹⁷⁷ As Niles argues the battle and the poem involve "an issue of national importance" ("Maldon" 447).

Finally, the overwhelming reference to vertical orientation, with falling and lying opposed to standing firm, creates a powerful effect. While falling and lying mean dying, standing means living; down is death, up is life. The poem thus counters all of the expected death of a poem based on a historical event with an assertion of the perseverance of life.¹⁷⁸ The typical interpretation of the poem as an encomium works in part due to artful inclusion of this metaphorical system of oppositions.¹⁷⁹ Byrhtnoth's death takes on the special journey motif, his falling is abbreviated, while his persistent lying emphasized;¹⁸⁰ the Anglo-Saxon warriors staunchly remain lying where they fall, and steadfastly stand, even in a losing effort. Amidst all the downward motion of death, upright standing cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, the text also insists on the physical presence of death. The dead emphatically do not leave the present world with some abstract departure or to some heavenly kingdom. They are there, lying on the ground, and the living must deal with that reality—past and future. Thus, contrary to some scholarly opinion,¹⁸¹ *The Battle of Maldon* functions as a political argument, supported by the manner in which death is portrayed in the poem—real and present. Though the heroic warriors do everything humanly possible to exhibit the values of bravery and loyalty, their death is inevitable. The poem viscerally grinds into its audience

¹⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that, to some extent, the poem owes its existence to those who lived, as it was likely informed by the testimony of survivors. Of course, the older view of the poem as an eyewitness account retains little currency. For the poem's historicity, see Bessinger, Gneuss, Scattergood, and especially Hans Anderson.

¹⁷⁹ This analysis supports the heroic reading of the poem offered by, among others, Scragg's edition: "Loyalty is the theme of the poem" (40).

¹⁸⁰ Joseph Harris notes that the repeated references to the fallen body of Byrhtnoth in the speeches of the retainers coincides with expressions of desire to lie beside him, reinforcing Woolf's ideal of men dying for their lord ("Love" 99).

¹⁸¹ Fulk and Cain 220.

the futility of resistance to the Vikings, with the continual reminders of death, embodied in the physical remains of the warriors who perceptibly fall and persistently lie upon the land they sought to protect.¹⁸²

Living Death: *The Wife's Lament*

Now that we have a pretty good sense of the range of available metaphors for death in Old English, and the effects they can create by their deployment and patterning, I would like to finish this chapter with a look at one more poem to see how our understanding might affect a long-standing critical controversy. *The Wife's Lament*, from the Exeter Book, features a female speaker, unusual for the elegies, who recounts her peculiar condition of exile. Unlike the subjects of male elegies, who wander free, the Wife is restricted to a cave. Stuck in a cave in the earth all alone and pacing about as she pines for her lord, the Wife seems like a ghost, speaking from beyond the grave.

The idea of the Wife being dead is an old one. About forty years ago, Elinor Lench published an argument that the speaker's puzzling circumstances—dwelling in an *eorðscraefe* ["earth-cave"], without any obvious means of support, and unable to leave—could be explained by the woman being dead. Further, Lench contends that death, rather than imprisonment, would be consistent with treatment of an adulterous woman in the period; she infers adultery and murder from the threatening words of the husband's kin. Thus the final lines of the poem comprise an ironic curse on the husband responsible for

¹⁸² John Niles would agree with this reading as he argues that the poem is a defense of appeasement policies to stem the Vikings' depredations:

The *Maldon* poet asks us to visualize the kind of disaster that can ensue when deterrence fails and some rather insolent Viking raiders, living outside English law, attempt to extort money from the men of Essex and their leader Byrhtnoth. ... In the future, the poem implies, the English will have to negotiate their relations with the Vikings delicately if they are to overcome the legacy of this loss. (465)

her death. Lench refers to the Anglo-Saxon belief in the supernatural, then claims that “the cumulative effect of repetition of words like *eorðscræf*, ‘earth-pit,’ *eorðsele*, ‘earth-hall,’ and *leger*, ‘tomb,’ is funereal in the extreme; nor does the speaker ever refer to her residence as an earthly abode” (19). Critics responding to Lench have argued either for a literal reading of the *eorðscræf*, focusing on evidence of actual caves suitable for habitation, or for her metaphorical reading, with the poem as a death-song. Though Fulk and Cain call the idea of the Wife being dead “a surprisingly tenacious vein of criticism” (189), the view has never achieved currency. Recent work relegates the notion to the footnotes, as does John Niles when he writes, “Much of the pathos of the speaker's condition is that she lives a kind of ‘living death’ in a place as cheerless as the grave, but she is not therefore to be regarded as a revenant” (“Problem” 1109).

I will not argue here for a definite reading of *The Wife's Lament* that can either claim, yes, the wife is dead, or no, she is not.¹⁸³ Instead, I want to show how the metaphors for death in Old English that we have been exploring in this chapter do not point to a literal death as their referent, but rather create the affective sensation of death in the poem. The language used to convey these metaphors occurs throughout the poem, though not always in expressions applying directly to the speaker's condition. So I can't help but think that such pervasive use of the language of death primes an audience to see death in *The Wife's Lament*, perhaps encouraged by the poem's well-known ambiguity

¹⁸³ Emily Jensen agrees as she argues that reading the *eorðscræf* in too literal a manner, whether as cave home or grave, diminishes the power of the poem's central image which communicates “those feelings of despair and loneliness that most critics acknowledge to be present in the Wife's Lament regardless of the specific interpretation of character and events they posit” (451).

and obscurity. I think this can explain why the interpretation of death can be so tenacious.¹⁸⁴ The Wife in effect experiences a living death.

The first metaphor that activates an impression of death in *The Wife's Lament* is DEATH IS DEPARTURE. There are many signs of departure in the poem. The first are hinted at with the language of a journey early in the poem, departure being the initial stage of the journey. The word *sið*, which means journey, as we have seen, appears in some form four times in *The Wife's Lament*. To open the poem, the speaker asserts that she composes this song about her personal *sið*. This journey she speaks of can be the literal travel she makes resulting from the mysterious circumstances of the relationship with her lord and his kin. But more generally it is the experiences of her life since she has “up aweox” [“grown up”] (3). But this temporal point of origin urges one to treat her *sið* as her life, an instance of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor. The speaker soon refines the nature of these journeys, calling them “wræcsipa” [“exile-journeys”] (5). The exilic quality of the travels suits the situation of murder and feud alluded to later. Thus the speaker weeps for her “wræcsipas” (38) from within her state of isolated confinement. In addition to life being conceived of as a journey, life here on earth, in a patristic context, is

¹⁸⁴ Antonina Harbus's explanation of “text worlds,” a concept from cognitive theory (*Cognitive Approaches* 70-103) reinforces my reading of *The Wife's Lament*. Harbus explains:

It assumes that to understand language we have to conceptualise its propositions; to create coherence from extended pieces of discourse, we have to keep track of these propositions in a systematic way, make inferences from them as a whole, and synthesise them with customized selections from stored knowledge. Text World Theory explains how this involved cognitive process works, by claiming that people make sense of discourse through the creation of mental representations of the ideas provoked by that discourse. ... The process of creating coherence from these scenarios is cumulative and adaptive: the reader incrementally takes information from the text, with which general knowledge, stored schemas, inferencing and acts of the imagination are selectively combined within the reading process. (70)

This mental process strikes me as capable of creating impressions from carefully managed linguistic information that can seem as clear and meaningful as directly expressed propositions.

a journey of exile from a heavenly home. The last instance of *sið* in the poem refers to the speaker's lord, whose "fromsip" ["journey away"] (33) afflicts her painfully.

While *sið* only implies departure, the verb *gewitan* ["to depart"] denotes it directly. This word appears twice in *The Wife's Lament*. First it describes the lord who "gewat heonon of leodum / ofer yþa gelac" ["departed from here from his people over the motion of waves"] (6b-7a). A few lines later, the speaker reports "ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan" ["then I departed to travel to seek service"] (9). Though they can certainly be understood literally, these departures, along with the journeys alluded to, are evocative of death, based on the metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE.

Conceptually related to departure is the notion of DEATH IS SEPARATION, which is usually more of an internal event, as we have often seen in the parting of soul and body to describe death. In *The Wife's Lament*, two verbs occur with *dælan* as a root—"todælden" (12b) and "gedælde" (22a). The first, with the separation-reinforcing prefix *to-*, comes as the speaker reports that the lord's kin plotted to completely separate them: "þæt hy todælden unc" ["that they would separate us"] (12b). And the second comes with a vow that only death could ever separate the couple: "þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana" ["that nothing would separate us, except death alone"] (22). The standard reading interprets these separations as occurring between the speaker and her husband. More allegorical readings have them represent body and soul, which of course are separated in death. I would argue that the intensified separation, as suggested by the *to-* prefix, points more clearly to death, which is a separation of body and soul, or a departure of the dying one from the world, or even a loss of life, often metaphorically characterized as a possession that can be lost. Such is the case in *Waldere*, when the hero is given the

choice, “lif forleosan oððe langne dom / agan” [“to lose life or have lasting fame”] (10-11).

Position and orientation are similarly important in *The Wife’s Lament*, again bringing death into prominence with the DEATH IS DOWN metaphor. Since death is associated with being prone and in a low position—as of a fallen body on the ground or a buried corpse below it—the Wife’s underground enclosure is significant. As I have mentioned, much of the past argument for her being dead rests on this location. The “eorðscræfe” (28b) or “eorðsele” (29a) does indeed resemble a grave, and the former term in particular is used for “grave” in other contexts, but there might be even more to this situation. Because the position of a body relative to standing upright is a well-attested way to express death, it is especially significant that vertical orientation is mentioned very early in the poem, in the line I quoted above: “sibpan ic up aweox” [“since I grew up”] (3b). Up, of course, is the direction one grows when standing, and is the standard point of reference, the prototypical position of life. Growing up shows health and progress in life. To start the poem with reference to upward orientation makes the repeated references to downward orientation or position in the following lines all the more salient. The phrase “under actreo” [“under an oak tree”] appears in 28a and 36a. That is where she must reside, within the dark woods, and among dark dales and high hills. “Under actreo” emphasizes her low position relative to the landscape of her environment. Furthermore, she says “þær ic sittan mot” [“there I must sit”] (37a). The sitting position expresses both her immobility, but also a low position relative to standing upright.

DEATH IS A CHOICE, which we have noted empowers heroes and saints, may be present in *The Wife's Lament*, though this is a more tenuous interpretation. When the speaker reports that “Het mec hlaford min her heard niman” [“my lord commanded me to take a home here”] (15). The verb *niman* means “to take,” but often with the force of catching or seizing, both intentional acts. But what is being taken has been disputed. To retain the manuscript reading of “her heard” would be to take, as Anne Klinck does, *heard* in an adverbial sense, resulting in a line meaning “my lord commanded, cruel, to seize me here” (181). But *heard* might also be a substantive, so that she is ordered to take on a cruel situation or a hardship, namely her exilic isolation: “my lord commanded me to take a cruel thing here.” In line 19a the poem uses *heard* as a word element indicating a lack, which would make sense here too if she is taking on a situation as defined by what she is missing—her lord, other people, or even her life. Bernard Muir emends *heard* to *eard*, resulting in “to take up an abode.” If this abode is the death that has been argued, then the line in question would seem to express a choice (or at least a compelled intention) for death. This death is conceived of as either a thing to take (in a reversal of the LIFE IS A POSSESSION metaphor) or a place in which to reside (which fits the spatial conceptions associated with life and death we have already seen).

Other minor signs pointing to death abound in the poem. Immobility, another physical sign of death, is expressed in the sitting position alluded to earlier, as well as the layered imagery of enclosure—in the cave, in the forest, in the valley, in (or near) towns choked with briars. If LIGHT IS LIFE, then the two instances of *uht* (7b, 35a), the time just before dawn, communicate the darkness of death. When the Wife says she is “eal...oflangad” [“completely seized with longing”] (29b), she could be alluding to death

as well. The prefix *of-* often gives the force of killing, as in verbs like *ofslean* [“to kill by blow”] or *ofsceotan* [“to kill by shot”]. Here the wife could be killed by longing. Even a DEATH IS JOURNEY FROM HERE metaphor could be active as when she says “ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede” [“I have few friends in this land”] (16), in contrast to her comment that “frynd sind on eorþan / leofe lifgende” [“friends are on earth, beloved living ones”] (33b-34a). The friends are clearly located on earth, which is of course a very conventional expression. But referring to them specifically as living, and the Wife’s claim that she has few (read: no) friends in the place where she is, make the *on eorþan* expression a little more pointed. Those people who are alive are on earth, the usual “here;” but the Wife is not there, thus not “here” in the existential sense.

By the preceding analysis, I do not mean to argue that wherever we find language of a journey or separation or some low position, we should think that a metaphor for death lies behind the language. And I do not firmly say that, yes, the Wife is dead, speaking as a ghost, as others have asserted based on plot suppositions and the image of the grave. Rather, I want to explain why that view has been so enduring. I would argue that the high concentration of language saturated with metaphors associated with death resonates, certainly with modern readers, but perhaps also with the contemporary audience, to create a strong impression of death in *The Wife’s Lament*. Attention to spatiality, particularly distant remove, separation, downward position, enclosure, and immobility intensifies the death-like character of the poem.

The poem’s pathos is indeed created by an effect of living death, an effect due in no small part to the work of some kind of doubly metaphorical operation. Even though it does not always refer directly to the Wife, the language of the poem can metaphorically

refer to death, which implies an actual occurrence of death, which in turn communicates all the feelings and attitudes of sorrow that are associated with death. I don't think those two ideas cancel each other out to leave us with a purely literal poem, but the language relating to the physical associations of death conveys the affective associations of death, with an actual death in the middle optional. For my metaphorical reading, it ultimately doesn't matter whether the Wife is dead. What matters is this free-floating death which is available for further metaphorical readings: death of identity, death of agency, death or social self, etc. The various conceptions of death permeate the poem to convey the death-like quality of the Wife's abject suffering, whatever its precise nature.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORLD

Introduction: The Anglo-Saxon Cosmos

If the self and its participation in the life cycle required metaphorical terms for understanding and expression for the Anglo-Saxons, so too did the world they lived in, both during and after life. Consider, for instance, the short Old English poem known as *Cædmon's Hymn*,¹⁸⁵ which features an account of the creation of the world:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,
meotodes meahte and his modgeþanc,
weorc wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,
ece drihten, or onstealde.
He ærest sceop eorðan bearnum
heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;
þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
ece drihten, æfter teode
firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.

[Now we must praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian, the might of the
Measurer and his mind-thought, the works of the Glory-father, as he
established the beginning of every wonder, eternal Lord. He first shaped
for the children of the earth, heaven as a roof, holy Shaper; then,

¹⁸⁵ This poem comes to us in twenty-one manuscript copies, in both Latin and English versions (Fulk and Cain 142), and in two Old English dialects, Northumbrian and West Saxon (34). This text is the West Saxon version of the poem, which is part of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*.

mankind's Guardian, eternal Lord, afterwards ordained the middle-region,
the earth for men, almighty Lord.]

This poem is a creation song glorifying God, who is described as the powerful creator and shaper of the world. Threatening to overshadow the importance of the creator God in the poem is the resulting work—the actual created world. While sparse in details, this world is communicated in ways that reveal a few particularly Anglo-Saxon conceptions for the world, both earthly and heavenly. God is “heofonrices weard” [“heaven-kingdom's Guardian”] (1b), and the element *rice-*, though it more commonly means a power (BT I), can also mean the place over which power is extended, hence a kingdom (II). This is, of course, a traditionally Christian way to describe heaven (more on this shortly), but the poem does not stop there in its description of this realm. God also made heaven as a roof for the world: “heofon to hrofe” (6a). Heaven is clearly an upper limit here, a boundary on top of our own world, serving as a shelter, both conceptually (protection from sin, death, etc.) and physically (topping the world thought of as a constructed building). Thus the world is called “middangeard” [“middle-region”] (7a), as it sits below heaven and, by implication, above some other realm.

With its heaven as a kingdom and roof, and earth as a middle region, *Cædmon's Hymn* barely scratches the surface for all the ways heaven and earth (not to mention hell) operate in the Anglo-Saxon world-view. Old English verse abounds with descriptions of heaven, hell, and earth. The cosmos the Anglo-Saxons referred to in their poetry is certainly based on medieval Christian ideas, but they were selective in what aspects of this cosmos they adopted and innovative in blending some native Germanic

features with the classically influenced Christian system.¹⁸⁶ This chapter serves as an explanation of the ways the Anglo-Saxons conceived of the three worlds of heaven, hell, and earth, as well as the cosmic structure that comprises them all. Many of the ways in which these worlds were understood and expressed are metaphorical in nature.

There is something different, however, about the representation of the concepts of heaven and hell. To say that HEAVEN IS A ROOF is clearly metaphorical as it transfers an aspect of a house to creation. But if I offer HEAVEN IS A KINGDOM as a metaphor reflected in the Old English term *heofonrice*, or suggest that Old English poetic descriptions of hell betray a HELL IS A COLD PLACE metaphor, one might object that these are not metaphors at all, but rather just descriptions of the way the culture really believed these places to be:

Heaven *is* a kingdom, hell *is* cold.¹⁸⁷ But, as I challenged Lockett's view that the hydraulic model was not metaphorical for the Anglo-Saxons, so do I challenge the idea that heaven and hell are not described metaphorically. A metaphor, in the sense that I am using it here, is the transfer of aspects from one conceptual domain to another, or the blending of two or more such domains. A kingdom is a domain for which the Anglo-Saxons had a clear understanding based upon lived experience; the features of the domain include a particular extension of land, a ruler who controls this land, subjects under this ruler, thrones, etc. Heaven is something beyond the direct experience of the Anglo-Saxons. It is a place or a state that must take on the features of a real place, here a

¹⁸⁶ Jennifer Neville has claimed that "[o]ne can look for hints of how the Anglo-Saxons visualised the shape of the cosmos, but there is little evidence, in poetry at least, that they visualised it at all" (146). Although Neville is right insofar as there is little formal discussion of the cosmos in the poetry, it cannot be said that the Anglo-Saxons did not visualize the cosmos in their poetry, as will become clear shortly.

¹⁸⁷ Martha Bayless, in *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture*, argues that organization of the universe is based on a system of likenesses, specifically to the orientation of the body, which, contrary to Lakoff and Johnson, corresponds to the moral order of the universe, rather than vice versa (138-149).

kingdom, in order to be discussed. The fact that the Anglo-Saxons specifically described this kingdom in terms they were familiar with—timbered halls, loyal retainers, etc.—reveals a metaphorical operation dependent on cultural beliefs. Just because they actually believed heaven to be the place they describe does not discount its metaphoricity. I grant that the metaphors HEAVEN IS A ROOF and HEAVEN IS A KINGDOM are each of a slightly different nature from the other—the first is a clear transfer from one domain to the other, while the second is more of a blend of concepts. But they are still both metaphors and I will refer to them as such throughout this chapter.

Ultimately, what I seek to explain in this chapter is the Anglo-Saxon culture's understanding of the world as expressed in the language of their poetry. I maintain that the worlds of heaven, hell, and earth are rendered as places with particular spatial and metaphorical valences which can tell us something about the culture's values and about the effects of particular poems that express them. This is more clearly true for the imagined spaces of heaven and hell, but I also argue that the earth, already a physical space, takes on more abstract, but meaningful dimensions and qualities in its expression in the language.¹⁸⁸ Each of these three places simultaneously are and are not places. Heaven and hell are not places that can be inhabited, measured, or directly described by the Anglo-Saxons. They are theological concepts which take the form of physical spaces in order to make them comprehensible to human beings. The earth, on the other hand, is a physical space inhabited by the Anglo-Saxons. Itself the earth is quite complex in the features and dimensions of its physical space. Yet, for the Anglo-Saxons, this natural

¹⁸⁸ Nicholas Howe, in *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, demonstrates that a meaningful imaginary world like that of the Anglo-Saxons in their poetry shows how the real world can never just be reduced to the physical features of its geography.

complexity is highly simplified, which raises certain questions about why the earthly world would be characterized this way. I will argue that this world-space is also articulated metaphorically and carries specific valences. With all three of these metaphysical domains, the shape of the place tells us much about the nature or function of that place for the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, though the purpose of the present project is to expose native Anglo-Saxon systems of thought, their understanding of heaven and hell is necessarily bound to the Christian conceptions of these places.

Heaven: The High Fortress Home

In the example of *Cædmon's Hymn* treated above, I noted two phrases which refer to heaven: “heofonrices weard” (1b) and “heofon to hrofe” (6a). This language only touches upon the Anglo-Saxon conception of heaven—as a kingdom ruled by God and as a roof to the terrestrial world as created by God. This heaven is understood in terms familiar and understandable to the Anglo-Saxons, exposing a tension that Jeffrey Russell identifies “between the theological need for an abstract heaven and the artistic and everyday need for physical images” (3). Old English poetry operates in this very tension, tending to prefer the physical over the theological. It is thus that conceptual metaphors emerge to communicate heaven as a variety of places. Though heaven may indeed be “beyond categories” (Russell 6), the language of the Anglo-Saxons certainly categorizes heaven (or heavens) for its poetical, rhetorical, and perhaps theological purposes. Russell acknowledges the necessity of metaphor for heaven, however, “to expand and open out

¹⁸⁹ I heed Howe's warning that “[t]o value representations of place in Anglo-Saxon texts only for their abstract or figural significance, as if the local made no claims on those who created them, is to misunderstand both the terms of representation and the people that used them to make sense of their world” (*Writing the Map* 48), and seek not only to explain the structures of their concepts of space, but also to connect them to specific poetic purposes, which are necessarily conditioned by the culture, if not clearly the landscape they inhabited.

meaning” (7). He explains that “[t]raditional Jewish and Christian thinkers recognized that metaphor expresses a deeper reality than can be obtained through the overt sense [what one usually calls the literal]” (8); “[t]hus heaven is best understood by metaphor” (9).

But before exploring the possibilities of heavenly metaphors and conceptualization in Old English poetry and their implications, it would be useful to establish a standard for comparison. The Anglo-Saxons, steeped as they were in the Christian tradition, would be expected to adopt orthodox conceptions of heaven from this tradition. And indeed they did. Holy scriptures, known through the Latin Vulgate, and patristic writings were readily available to most writers (including translators) of Old English poetry. A survey, therefore, of these influential writings can provide the baseline by which to describe, explain, and analyze the literary concept of heaven of the Anglo-Saxons. These scriptural and patristic conceptions will be well known to scholars of Christianity and the Middle Ages, but it is important to outline the sources for the Anglo-Saxons’ received traditions so that the method of selection and the development of innovation may stand out more clearly.

Though “[w]hether heaven is a space or place is a ... difficult question” (Russell 12), the idea of heaven as a physical place is a commonplace in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures; the most general metaphor operating is HEAVEN IS A PLACE. The opening lines of Genesis detail God’s creation of the world, suggesting that heaven and earth are roughly the same kind of entities: “in principio creavit deus caelum et terram” [“in the beginning, God created heaven and earth”] (1.1). Since the earth is essentially a place, one can assume that heaven, paralleled in the phrasing, is essentially a place as

well. Heaven may be a different place from the earth, with varying individual features, but both can contain the same types of features and landscapes. In the Latin Vulgate, the word *caelum* refers to this place of heaven, but is also used to represent the sky, blurring the distinction between physical locus that we can observe from the earth, and a metaphysical place, represented metaphorically as physical landscape. Additionally, these lines clearly identify the physical relation between the two places. Heaven is above the earth, orientationally up, with some kind of foundation (or as some kind of structure) that borders the top of this world and separates earth from heaven. In the Vulgate, this is called the *firmamentum*, a kind of support structure in common Latin usage. Genesis also notes that God affixed lights in the “firmamento caeli” [“support of heaven”] (1.14)—sun, moon, and stars. Birds are created to fly above the earth and “sub firmament caeli” [“under the support of heaven”] (1.20). Heaven ceases to be a concern of Genesis after the beginning of chapter two, which reiterates the creation of heaven and earth a few times. The picture of heaven that emerges is very vague at this point—it seems to just be the sky with a foundation separating it from the earth. This heaven is nothing but an upper region of creation. As the Hebrew Bible develops, “Jewish images of heaven are centered on the Temple, the court (implying both royalty and justice), and the garden,” but for the Jews, “the kingdom of God [was placed] on earth rather than in the heavens” (Russell 31).

The kind of place heaven is thought to be develops further in the Christian New Testament, especially the synoptic gospels. In these scriptures, heaven is certainly still up, as John reports that only the one who descended from the “caelo” has ascended to the “caelum” (2.13). And heaven is still a place, not just merely a neutral space, but rather a

kingdom, a land ruled by a king; thus HEAVEN IS A KINGDOM. This conception is certainly used in the Old Testament, as in Psalm 10: “dominus in temple sanctum suo dominus in caelo sedis eius” [“the lord in his holy temple, the lord in his seat in heaven”] (5). God’s lordship and power is emphasized by the appellation *dominus* and the presence of a throne, signifying rule. But, in the New Testament, the phrases *regnum caelorum* [“kingdom of the heavens”] (Matthew (3.2), *regnum dei* [“kingdom of God”] (Luke 4.43), or just *regnum* [“kingdom”] (Luke 1.33) dominate references to heaven. For example, the gospel of Matthew alone uses some form of *regnum caelorum* thirty-four times to refer to the place or state of heaven.¹⁹⁰

This heavenly kingdom has certain expected corollary features which entail from the metaphor of HEAVEN IS A KINGDOM. One of these features that appears frequently is the seat mentioned above, as the most localized place from which a ruler exerts power. In fact most of the metaphorical entailments for heaven operating in the Vulgate are not just as a land ruled by a king, but more narrowly localized. Heaven thus seems more like an enclosed city or estate. In Matthew, Christ speaks of the way to eternal life (or heaven) as through an “angustum portam” [“narrow gate”] (7.13-14). Only walled cities or structures would have a gate. Heaven conceived as a large estate is even clearer in John when Christ explains that “in domo patris mei mansiones multae sunt” [“in my father’s house there are many rooms”] (14.2). The Pauline letters of the New Testament continue this metaphor a little more explicitly and concretely. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that if our earthly home is destroyed, we have a heavenly “aedificationem” [“building”] from God,

¹⁹⁰ The heavens being denoted as plural dates back to the Hebrew scripture and suggests different levels or types of heavens, which would explain a difference between the physical sky above and the transcendent heaven of the gods (see the discussion of Augustine to come). I would add that differing metaphorical models for heaven could account for the perseverance of the plural.

an eternal “domum in caelis” [“house in the heavens”] (5.1). This line emphasizes the comforting and protective status of heaven as a homely structure. And in Hebrews, Paul speaks of heaven more as a city, claiming that Abraham looked forward to a “fundamenta habentem civitatem” [“city with foundations”] and that God has prepared a “civitatem” [“city”] for the faithful (11.10).

These accounts add up only sketchily to a city or citadel—it has a gate, rooms, and a throne, but no other details (landscape, layout, materials, etc.) emerge from a metaphorical blend which combines a very bare concept of heaven as a place with a few basic features of a monarch’s citadel. That is, until the visions in the Apocalypse of John, which push upon the metaphor with more detail, in keeping with the vivid nature of the visions. Chapter seven refers to the usual throne and temple of heaven (15), but chapter twenty-one presents very precise details for how this version of heaven, called a new Jerusalem, is structured. The city has “murum magnum et altum habens portas duodecim” [“a great but high wall, with twelve gates”] (12) and “fundamenta duodecim” [“twelve foundations”] (14). Its layout is four-square, with walls 1500 miles long; a variety of jewels stud the foundations and pearls adorn the gates; the buildings are made of a gold as clear as glass; God himself is even the temple (16-23). Chapter twenty-two follows with a description of the “fluvium aquae vitae” [“river of water of life”], flowing from beneath the throne and flanked by the tree of life (2). The heaven of the Revelation is vast, well-protected, opulent, and verdant. No doubt the vision of John portrays heaven in such a detailed way for some purpose of reifying the concept of heaven as it manifests itself physically on earth at the Last Judgment.

Heaven as a city continued to be developed by the Church Fathers, who were very influential on the thought of the Middle Ages to follow. Writing between the fourth and seventh centuries, the four Great Fathers were Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory.¹⁹¹ One of the most influential to the Anglo-Saxons was Augustine of Hippo, who flourished from the late fourth to the early fifth centuries.¹⁹² In his *On Christian Doctrine*, *Confessions*, and *City of God*, three texts known to the Anglo-Saxons,¹⁹³ Augustine addresses the question of the nature of heaven. Ever the reader of allegory and metaphor, Augustine is a particularly appropriate source for this project, as he exposes metaphors in his analysis of scripture, explicitly and implicitly. The saint claims that “[t]he just men of antiquity imagined and foretold the Heavenly Kingdom in terms of an earthly kingdom” (*On Christian Doctrine*, chapter 20). Augustine here makes an analysis consistent with what we have seen in the examples above, but, in limiting the judgment to people of old, the saint does not go far enough—heaven continued to be understood with the metaphor of the earthly kingdom, as we shall soon see. Augustine also addresses the polysemy of the term heaven, pointing to a passage from the 113th Psalm (in the numbering of the Vulgate): “caelum caeli domino terram autem dedit filiis hominum” [“the heaven of heaven to the lord, but he gave the earth to the children of men”] (24).

¹⁹¹ Despite Gregory’s importance to the Anglo-Saxons, his vision of heaven (green meadows, flowers, herbs, golden-bricked house) from the *Dialogi* (4.37), though translated into Old English by Wærferth in the late 9th or early 10th century, does not seem to have had much influence on the poetry.

¹⁹² Though this assumption of Augustine’s influence, stemming from J. D. A. Ogilvy’s 1936 comment that “it would be much safer to assume that the English knew any given work of Augustine than they did not” (qtd. in Lockett 180), is long-standing in the scholarship, Leslie Lockett challenges it on the grounds that the evidence points away from the idea that “the typical Anglo-Saxon poet or homilist or hagiographer had access to a patristic library of the calibre of Bede’s or Ælfric’s” (181). Conclusive evidence of Augustine’s influence is as yet forthcoming from the *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (180).

¹⁹³ Michael Lapidge lists the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts which contain these texts (*Anglo-Saxon Library* 282-85) and reports that they were variously known to Aldhelm (179), Bede (196-99), Alcuin (232), Lantfred (240), Abbo of Fleury (242), Ælfric (252), and Byrhtferth of Ramsey (267-68).

Augustine thus asks, “[w]here is that other heaven which we cannot see and compared with which all that we see is merely earth?” (*Confessions* 12.2). This is an acknowledgment of the fact that when we use the same word to describe the upper part of creation and the eternal place or state of heaven, we are necessarily tied down to what we are capable of experiencing. Augustine explains: “How then could it be described in such a way that even dull minds could grasp it, except by means of some familiar word?” (12.4). He even urges us to consider the visible heavens above to be just a part of the earth (12.2). Pointing to the lines in the first chapter of Genesis, Augustine distinguishes this earthly heaven as the firmament (12.4). And although the saint refers to the heaven of heavens as a dwelling place for God (12.11, 12.15), he insists that is not a physical place, but rather an “intellectual heaven” (12.13) and “not a material house of earth or even of some heavenly matter. It is spiritual” (12.15).

Augustine is, overall, very careful to distinguish the physical heaven of the sky and the spiritual heaven beyond, while still recognizing the necessity of reference to the physical. But in his later *City of God*, Augustine implies that heaven is indeed a physical place as our physical bodies are taken there by our spiritual souls (13.18, 22.4, 22.11), though he does admit these bodies will be different and spiritual (13.22, 22.4, 22.11). In most of this work, though, Augustine complicates the distinction between literal and metaphorical. He explores the idea of heaven as a city, which he finds in the Psalms, to set that up as a metaphor for the blessed state of existence, “interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world” (11.1). Pushing the metaphor even further, Augustine even personifies the City of God, so that it speaks (14.28), leads a life, obeys God’s laws, and makes a pilgrimage on earth (19.17). This city, a new heaven (in reference to the

Apocalypse), will eventually come down to earth, and has actually always been approaching: “This City has been coming down from heaven since its beginning, ... [but] the splendour of that city will be made apparent” at the last judgment (20.17).¹⁹⁴

But my purpose here is not to analyze the Jewish, early Christian, and patristic texts in much detail. Rather, these examples should demonstrate what metaphors and conceptions were available to the Anglo-Saxons from the Latin scriptures known throughout the period of literary production in England of the late first millennium. Russell asserts that “[u]nder Augustine’s influence, the city became the standard metaphor [for heaven] in the West” (86). Thus, for most of the holy scriptures the Anglo-Saxons knew, heaven was a place above, and an enclosed and familiar space like a city or citadel. These conceptions certainly appear in Old English, but the poetry also develops further from some of the common Biblical conceptions of what heaven was thought to be, and emphasizes specific aspects of these ideas that were appropriate to their interest in the concept of heaven. The remainder of this section will attempt to distinguish several metaphorical conceptions of heaven and comment on how they are put to use in Old English poetry.

A few notes on Old English terminology will be helpful before proceeding. In 1985, Jane Roberts offered “A Preliminary ‘Heaven’ Index for Old English,” which compiled from the then in-progress Glasgow University Historical Thesaurus a list of dozens of roughly synonymous terms for heaven in Old English. She reports three major semantic divisions for heaven terms: “the heavens,” “heaven (as God’s realm),” and

¹⁹⁴ Augustine’s complex conceptual blend for the City combines an abstract physical city with the transcendent place of heaven, then combines this resulting blend of a heavenly city with a blessed spiritual state, then combines that resulting blend with a physical place on earth.

“mythic heavens” (210-11). While the third category is small and limited to ideas about an earthly paradise (e. g. *neorxnawang*),¹⁹⁵ the first two overlap widely in both simplex and complex terms. Roberts admits that the differentiation between these two categories is likely anachronistic and “more appropriate to modern scientific thought than to the medieval understanding of the universe” (211).¹⁹⁶ Proceeding from this claim, I outline four quite common terms for heaven in Old English here (though others will emerge in the discussion following). *Heofon* is the most common term for heaven in Old English and the source of the modern word, appearing mostly in prose as the standard term (4819 times), but also plenty in poetry (547 times).¹⁹⁷ But there are three other primary terms to denote the lexical concept of heaven—*swegel*, *rodor*, and *lyft*. *Lyft* is more prosaic with only 93 of its 346 occurrences in poetry, while the other two are more poetic terms—101 of *swegel*’s 118 total instances occur in poetry, as do 141 of *rodor*’s 275. Each of these four terms can refer to the upper region of creation, whether the sky that birds and clouds may occupy, or the realm that only God and angels tend to inhabit. Each term, though, has its own specialization—*heofon* is most often the realm beyond, but can refer to power, majesty, and happiness; *swegl* is either the sky or the divine realm, but can convey the sun; *rodor* mostly signifies the firmament above, but also the sky or heavens; and *lyft*

¹⁹⁵ This sense of heaven is of less interest to this project, though, as is often noted in the scholarship (e. g. Roberts 212, Tristram 106), language and descriptions of an earthly paradise and a heavenly space tend to be confused. Russell claims that “[m]any languages make no clear distinction between the celestial paradise (the abode of the elect) and the earthly paradise (the Garden at the beginning of the world)” (xv). Old English would seem to exhibit this situation, though Bede insists upon the distinction in his vision of Drythelm in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* (5.12).

¹⁹⁶ Russell agrees: “In Hebrew, Greek, and the Germanic and Romance languages, the same word denotes the divine heaven and the physical sky; in distinguishing between ‘heaven’ and ‘sky,’ [Modern] English is atypical” (xiv).

¹⁹⁷ These numbers, and those following, include both simplex and compound instances of the terms surveyed.

is most often the sky or what we would call the atmosphere, though it can be the heavens above that as well. Although these four terms can specialize, they also all operate generally, and my assumption will be for a high degree of synonymy in order to best take account of context and plumb the concepts lying beneath the linguistic variety.

Generally, the Anglo-Saxon version of heaven is a physical place, usually high above the earth and functioning as a structure that forms the boundary of this world as a roof. Retaining from its Christian source the character of a kingdom, the Old English heaven is a fortified, defensive structure made of wood. The site is often a contested landscape, with God a warrior king and his angels portrayed as loyal retainers. To demonstrate this conception of heaven, I analyze primarily the Anglo-Saxons' native Old English poetic version of Genesis, actually two poems combined in the Junius Manuscript. The earlier portion, dated to the eighth century (Fulk and Cain 113), is called *Genesis A* and frames the text (lines 1-234 and 851-2936), with a later, intervening section called *Genesis B* (235-850), a translation of an Old Saxon *Genesis*, composed in the ninth century (Greenfield and Calder 210). The first *A* portion covers the rebellion of the angels and the creation of the world, while the *B* section expands on the rebellion, then develops the fallen angels' experience in hell, along with the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve. The final, long portion of *A* covers major events from the rest of Genesis up to the sacrifice of Isaac. In contrast to the Latin Genesis, which treats heaven only as the part of creation in or above the sky, this Old English version displays a much fuller, more Christian vision of heaven. This poem, taking many liberties with the Bible, provides a helpful contrast through which we can see how the Anglo-Saxons appropriated

the concept of heaven, but with meaningful differences.¹⁹⁸ I will discuss both portions of the poem as one, though there are differences in style (which I will comment on when appropriate) as they were not necessarily composed in the same cultural milieu.

The part of the Old English *Genesis* that most closely corresponds to the original creation story comes only after the section recounting the angelic rebellion and expulsion. The poem first accounts for God's creative activity with an report of his thoughts on who could replace the fallen angels as proper subjects of heaven:¹⁹⁹

þa þeah tode þeoden ure
modgeþonce, hu he þa mæran gesceaft,
eðelstaðolas eft gesette,
swegltorhtan seld, selran werode,
þa hie gielpsceaþan ofgifen hæfdon,
heah on heofenum. Forþam halig god
under roderas feng, ricum mihtum,
wolde þæt him eorðe and uproder
and sid wæter geseted wurde
woruldgesceafte on wraðra gield,
þara þe forhealdene of hleo sende. (92-103)

¹⁹⁸ Additionally, if Tom Shippey is to be believed, the poet of *Genesis B* composes much of its descriptions of hell in a fairly careless and formulaic manner based on convenient alliteration: "In *Genesis B*, it seems to me 'one word finds another': sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. This process explains both the hell and the heaven, the successes and the failures, of *Genesis B*" ("Hell" 171). Such apparent randomness can only validate my project as it reveals common conceptions for heaven (and hell).

¹⁹⁹ See Dorothy Haines' explanation of this text's use of the doctrine of replacement as "patristic, but distinctly Anglo-Saxon" in origin (154).

[Then our lord consulted with his thoughts how he might again settle, with a better troop, the great creations, home-foundations, heaven-bright seats, those which the arrogant-enemies had given up, high in the heavens. Therefore holy God under the heavens took control, with mighty power, desired that earth and heaven above and wide water be established in the world-creation in exchange for the cruel, neglectful ones who were sent from his shelter.]

There are hints of the Hebrew Genesis in this passage, as God intends to create heaven, earth and sea. And a few lines later, the Old English poem parallels the terse creation lines from the biblical source: “Her ærest gesceop ece drihten, / helm eallwihta, heofon and eorðan, / rodor arærde” [“here first the eternal lord, leader of all creatures, created heaven and earth, raised heaven”] (112-13a). But what is striking about this description in the former passage is that the creation of these spaces post-dates the activities already said to have occurred in heaven. This new creation occurs under that former heaven, and includes another heaven, best understood as the sky.²⁰⁰ The Anglo-Saxons, as did all medieval Christians, believed in some transcendent, eternal place which contains God and the angels, even before the creation of the material world.

That pre-creation heaven is the subject of the opening of *Genesis A*, as well as a good deal of *Genesis B*. These poems recount several important activities which take place in heaven (e.g. angelic rebellion and expulsion), and as a consequence, provide a

²⁰⁰ This split conception of heaven clearly reflects the polysemy of the word that Augustine wrestled with in Book 12 of his *Confessions*, a polysemy that still survives in Modern English when speakers, in order to affect a poetic flair, refer to the sky as “the heavens” (*OED* 1a-c). The polysemy generally broke down, however, in the thirteenth century with the incorporation of the Scandinavian loan word *ský* (Di Sciacca 175-76).

wealth of description for the concept of heaven. In general, these poems refer to heaven in an abstract way as a place with basic spatial features, but without much detail. First, heaven is obviously a place, a location within which entities can exist, moving to and from that space. Through all of the Old English Genesis, things come *from* heaven, including angels (66b, 85, 306b, 309a, 521b,²⁰¹ 533a), words of God (2912a-2913a), light (614b-616a, 810a-811a),²⁰² precipitation (808,²⁰³ 1372a), and sulfur (2543a). While these last three are natural phenomena, associated with the terrestrial sky, the angels are clearly human-like beings coming from heaven as a place. Things accordingly go *to* or *toward* heaven as well: God (240), terrestrial buildings (1667b, 1675a, 1681a). God's animate movement to heaven surely suggests a place, while buildings are oriented towards the place of heaven above. And things are often noted as being *in* heaven.²⁰⁴ God notes that a rainbow "on wolcnum" ["in the clouds"] (1538b) will be a sign of his promise of no more floods. While this rainbow is clearly something existing in the terrestrial skies, Satan mentions high buildings and beautiful homes as being in heaven too: "on heofonrice

²⁰¹ What is sent from heaven is either the agent of Satan designated as God's enemy (442b), or the fruit of the tree of death.

²⁰² The light from heaven, whether sun, stars, or celestial glory, is an important object of study for understanding the nature of the Christian and Anglo-Saxon heaven, but it is beyond the scope of this project. For one example, see Thomas Heffernan's "'The Sun Shall Be Turned to Darkness and the Moon to Blood': How Sin and Redemption Affect Heavenly Space in an Old English Transfiguration Homily" on one Old English homily's discussion of the dimming of the heaven's being attributed to Man's sin at the Fall and Doomsday, based on the medieval assumption that nature, including the structure of heavenly space, was inextricably connected to the actions of human beings. The planets, for example, were said to be of the same nature as Adam and Eve, and therefore experienced similar culpability (71).

²⁰³ The line reads "cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge" ["hail's shower comes oppressing from heaven"], but the term *scur* could refer to a cloud, cognate with Old Saxon *skion* (Di Sciacca 173-4), but this makes little difference for my point, except in offering another possible term for the sky as a cover, as in the *hapax legomenon* *sceo* in *Riddle 3* (41).

²⁰⁴ Contrary to Russell's explanation that "being in heaven is being in the presence of Christ, whether one encounters him, sees him, merges with him, or in a sense becomes him. One is in heaven insofar as one is 'in' Christ" (4), the heaven of Old English poetry is overwhelmingly treated as a physical place, rather than a state of being.

heahgetimbro / godlice geardas” (739a-740a). And there are many abstract qualities which clearly have their existence in heaven: peace (78b), joy (257a), and song (675b-676a). Note that these are predominately related to human experience and behavior, and what are most often located in heaven are the personified supernatural entities, the angels (21a, 255a, 338b-339a, 349b-350a, 410b, 417a-418a,²⁰⁵ 448a). Thus far, the Anglo-Saxon heaven is consistent with the general medieval Christian understanding of that place. Though this idea of heaven as a place may seem obvious, I want to establish basic orthodoxy before examining concepts more particular to Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

Another conception of heaven Old English poetry embraces is the height of heaven, which, while certainly orthodox, is one which the Anglo-Saxons favored disproportionately. Twenty-one times throughout the Old English *Genesis* some form of the semantic elements *up* [“up”] and *heah* [“high”], plus the verb *aræran* [“to raise up”] twice (114a, 1667a), appear in concert with heaven, sometimes standing in for the place itself (510a). In fact, many of the times heaven comes up in the long poem, it is qualified as being up or high, especially in the *Genesis B* portion. For example, God is “hehsta heofones waldend” [“highest heaven’s ruler”] (300a) and “heah heofoncyning” [“high heaven-king”] (463a). Though many of these *heah* terms apply most directly to God, only twice in the whole poem (124a, 172b) is God characterized as being high without a mention of heaven in the same line. This strong correlation suggests to me that, while *heah* can certainly mean important or powerful,²⁰⁶ it primarily applies to the spatial

²⁰⁵ This passage comes in Satan’s speech to his fallen angels, when he asks that they fly through the heavens, probably the terrestrial sky here, to encounter Adam and Eve.

²⁰⁶ A CONTROL IS UP metaphor can create this effect, but it also reflects the moral understanding of a hierarchical universe with God in his heaven at the top (Bayless 140-42).

height of heaven as up in or beyond the sky. In fact, the poem very often refers to earth as what is under the heavens, further emphasizing heaven's high location. Twenty-five times *Genesis A*²⁰⁷ mentions heaven with the common formula "X under heaven," where "heaven" represents one of four roughly synonymous terms: *heofon*, *rodor*, *swegel*, and *wolcen*; and X is what is located under heaven, usually a noun, as in "woruld under wolcnum" ["the world under the heavens"] (916b), or an adjective, as in "sweart under roderum" ["dark under the heavens"] (109a); verbs and adverbs can also occupy the variable spot. Occasionally the formula is inverted so that the variable follows *under*, or that which is under the heavens is noted in another line. That heaven is so often invoked in its high position and in language referring to the earth below it conveys both a power relationship between the two realms and an obsession with order and spatial placement, an idea I will return to at the end of this chapter.

The Old English *Genesis* poems' heaven is assuredly a defined space, located high and above the earth. But this conventional, though sketchy structure is only the scaffolding for a much richer Anglo-Saxon version of heaven. The beginning of *Genesis A* (1-14)²⁰⁸ provides three developed descriptions of heaven in its opening statement of praise glorifying God, especially his power to rule over heaven.²⁰⁹ Just as the first line of *Cædmon's Hymn* mentions heaven as a kingdom with God as its guardian or protector,

²⁰⁷ The fact that *Genesis B* contains no example of this formula is interesting, providing further evidence for the separate production of the two parts, but also implies slightly different interests or even conceptions between these two compositions.

²⁰⁸ That the Old English *Genesis* does not properly begin with a creation story, as does its primary exemplar, is somewhat surprising considering the Anglo-Saxon fascination with this story as evidenced by its rather high frequency of appearance in the poetic corpus, especially in openings of poems; twelve Old English poems include some kind of a creation story (Michelet 37).

²⁰⁹ This section is likely based on the Canon of the Mass's preface (Anlezark, *Old Testament* ix).

Genesis A opens with a reference to God as “rodera weard” [“guardian of the heavens”] (1b). A few lines later, it is said of God, “ac he bið a rice / ofer heofenstolas” [“but he is always the power over the seats of heaven”] (7b-8a). Finally, God is said to “sweglbošmas heold / þa wæron gesette wide and side” [“control the bosoms of heaven, which were set widely and extensively”] (9b-10b). These lines reveal that the predominant way the poet praises God’s power is by means of his relationship to heaven—his ability to guard, protect (1b), control (9b), and be the very power over it (7b). Heaven must be an exceedingly important space to be so dominated by God. What this important space precisely is, however, differs in each phrase. First, the heaven is that upper region of the skies or firmament, the *roder* (1b); second, it is a place of seats or thrones (8a); and third, it is a bosom, some kind of interior part or enclosure (9b), defined as extensively wide (10b). Using the sum of these descriptions, it would seem that the Anglo-Saxons’ reverence for God is due to his rule of a place high, wide, and ruled (as implied by the seats). This kind of heaven is certainly familiar from the biblical precedent,²¹⁰ but note that, unlike the Vulgate’s *Genesis*, there is little or no concern for the creation of heaven here; rather, the main interest is in heaven as a place for God to rule. This selective rendition of its source reveals what must have been most important to the Anglo-Saxons in their understanding of God and heaven.

What makes this version of heaven particularly Anglo-Saxon is the way it is treated as a site in which native social structures of lordship operate. *Comitatus*, a term

²¹⁰ And these aspects are often dismissed as merely “conventional” in the scholarship (e. g. Haines 153). Hildegard Tristram defends attention to the conventionality of Old English formulas by arguing that “[o]ur interest should concentrate on the individual treatment of patterns available to Old English authors and on the way they are fitted into their respective contexts” (113). While I agree with Tristram, I also feel that the very conventionality of expressions, culled together, can tell us something about underlying ideas as well as individual rhetorical uses.

from Tacitus's late first-century work *Germania*, has come to be applied to the bond of loyalty between a lord and his close retainers, often *thegns*.²¹¹ The heaven of the Old English *Genesis* is described as just such a political and social space, demarcated by the application of the lord God's rule and the loyalty of God's angelic followers. In the next section of *Genesis A* (15-91), the poem describes the angels in heaven:

þegnas þrymfæste þeoden heredon,
 sægdon lustum lof, heora liffrean
 demdon, drihtenes dugeþum wæron
 swiðe gesælige. (15a-18a)

[Glory-strong thanes praised their lord, said praise of desire, celebrated
 their life-lord, were very prosperous in the lord's hosts.]

To call the angels "þegnas" ["thanes"] and describe them with the term "dugeþum," which can mean "strength, power" (DOE 2) and denoted a band of experienced, loyal retainers (DOE 4.a), characterizes them as part of an Anglo-Saxon war-band, with God as their chief. The kingdom of heaven is an Anglo-Saxon kingdom, with all the trappings that go with it. The dissension of some of these angels is carried out in an appropriately territorial way, a further departure from the Vulgate precedent. The leader of the rebelling angels²¹² seeks to partition heaven, boasting that they could share "wuldorfæstan wic

²¹¹ The *thegn* was a high ranking member of the nobility who would be obliged to provide some kind of military support for his lord. On the bond of *comitatus*, see F. M. Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England* (302-307), which credits the obligation to defend and avenge a lord to an ancient Germanic ethos of an almost sacred character. Richard Abels's *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* challenges this assumption by arguing for the primary importance of economic ties in this relationship. Nevertheless, the ideals of this bond occur often in Old English literature—from *Beowulf* and the elegies, to the quasi-historical poems "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" and *The Battle of Maldon*.

²¹² Not specifically identified with Satan in *Genesis A*, he is named in *Genesis B*, but for convenience I will refer to him as Satan throughout.

werodes þrymme, / sid and swegltorht” [“the glory-strong dwelling-place, in the strength of their troop, wide and heaven-bright”] (27a-28a).

This kingdom of heaven is a contested land. Satan elaborates “þæt he on norðdæle / ham and heahsetl heofena rices / agan wolde” [“that he wished to possess in the north-part a home and high seat of heavens’ kingdom”] (32b-34a). The poem affirms God’s role as an Anglo-Saxon lord with the punishment of exile for the rebelling angels, portrayed as a rival troop: “sceof þa and scyrede scyppend ure / oferhidig cyn engla of heofnum, / wærleas werod” [“our creator then shoved and cut the prideful kin of angels from the heavens, faithless troop”] (65a-67a). Those who break faith with their lord must be sent into exile, as God does to these angels. Only now could it be said that “þa wæs soð swa ær sibb on heofnum” [“then truly there was as before peace in the heavens”] (78). For this Anglo-Saxon poet, the reason that the evil angels were cast out of heaven is that they betrayed their lord and sought to control a part of his kingdom. And for the Anglo-Saxons in general, God’s power is best expressed through his role as lord of a people and his ability to rule his lands uncontested. God is an emblematic representation of lordship created by and for a very hierarchical society built on loyalty to a lord and often engaged in territorial conflict. Control of a defined space is God’s most salient quality for the Anglo-Saxon poet.²¹³ Heaven is a kingdom defined not only by its ruler, but by the composition of its people—those who are collected and subjected to God’s power in a definite space.²¹⁴ This space, God’s territory, is heaven. While HEAVEN IS A

²¹³ In Fabienne Michelet’s words, “God’s power is therefore a power over space and Satan, as well as the first human beings, acknowledges this aspect of divine authority” (62).

²¹⁴ Michelet further explains: “Place and identity are linked: because their crime has altered their nature, Satan, Adam, and Eve have to occupy a place that corresponds to their new status. The Lord controls the spatial organization of both the visible and the invisible creations. He sets up thrones for the righteous

KINGDOM is a traditional Christian metaphor, it is expressed in Old English literature in familiar cultural terms.

The idealized bond between warriors in Anglo-Saxon society is further communicated with the repeated mention of thrones in these poems, especially in *Genesis B*. I have already noted several of these references to seats in *Genesis A*, when God is said to rule over the seats of heaven (8a), when God considers how to repopulate the seats left vacant by the angels expelled from heaven (95a), and when Satan seeks his own throne in the north (33a). It is important to note that most of the seats and thrones mentioned apply to where the angels as thanes sit, rather than where God himself sits and rules from. In fact, only three of the twelve references to heavenly seats point to the one from which God rules (260b, 566b, 667a). This is in stark contrast to the frequent biblical reference to God's throne we noted above; whereas Latin sources tell us of God's power being most centrally located in this smaller space within heaven, functioning as a microcosm of the space under his control and as a symbol of his power, the Anglo-Saxons seem much more concerned with the places of God's followers in heaven. A biblical source for this situation could well be the book of Revelation, where angelic seats are noted often, for example: "et in circuitu sedis sedilia viginti quattuor et super thronos viginti quattuor seniores sedentes circumamicti vestimentis albis et in capitibus eorum coronæ aureæ" ["and in a circle around the throne are twenty-four seats and upon the seats are twenty-four seated elders, dressed in white robes and on their heads are crowns of gold"] (4.4). But the seats in *Genesis A* also echo the importance of seats and seating

angels, hell for the wicked ones, He orders Adam and Eve to dwell in Paradise, He expels them from Eden when they are no longer worthy of it. He devises a place for everything material or immaterial" (62).

arrangement in Old English heroic poetry. *Beowulf*, for example, mentions the seats in Heorot several times: after Grendel's death, thanes "bugon þa to bence" ["sat then at the benches"] (1013a) and Wealhtheow "hwearf þa bi bence" ["turned to the benches"] (1088a) where Beowulf sat between her sons; and after Grendel's mother is killed, Beowulf went "setles neosan" ["to seek his seat"] (1786a). Such attention to the seats in Heorot emphasizes spatially the status of the loyal retainer.

Most of the times heavenly seats appear in the Old English *Genesis*, they are closely related to Satan and the fallen angels. The poem emphasizes the throne that Satan wishes to possess in heaven (33a, 273a, 281a, 300b²¹⁵), and those which were abandoned by the fallen angels (86b, 95a, 411b, 749a). It is not just desiring a throne as a seat of power that makes Satan's rebellion so pernicious, but the fact that he disdains his proper seat, his proper place in the social structure. Just as Michelet argues that leaving tracks on a path is an expression of power (109-13), inhabiting seats is as well. That God always has power over seats, will not allow his seat to be taken, and can remove others from their seats is further testament to the nature of God's power of lordship over a special space.

God's role as a lord of a territory or a kingdom in which the structure of the Anglo-Saxon warrior society plays out is supported by the high frequency of such appellations and descriptions as often befit the martial and heroic lord of Old English literature. The semantic element *rice* describes heaven more than thirty times in the Old English *Genesis*, most of them in *Genesis B* (twenty-six of thirty-three). Since this

²¹⁵ The poem states that God "wearp hine of þan hean stole" ["threw him from that high throne"], so the throne here could also refer to God's own throne as he wishes to supplant God, though it makes more sense to consider it the one Satan wished to rule from elsewhere in heaven.

section of the poem covers Satan's attempts to control heaven, then seek revenge upon its leader, it is appropriate that heaven's status as a political kingdom figure prominently. Even more compelling is the proportion of references to God that style him some kind of lord, leader, or protector, which happens an astounding 277 times in the poem. God is a *brego* ["ruler"], *cyning* ["king"], *dryhten* ["lord"], *ealdor* ["authority, superior"], *frea* ["lord, ruler"], *helm* ["protector"], *wealdend* ["ruler, possessor"], and *weard* ["guard, protector"]. Many of these terms appear alone without an object or qualifier, such that God is simply "frea" (1860a, etc.) or "drihten" (2894b, etc.). God often receives the qualifying epithets to emphasize some aspects of his nature: *ece* ["eternal"] and *æلميhtig* ["almighty"]²¹⁶ are the most common. Sometimes God is lord of some more abstract qualities: glory,²¹⁷ life,²¹⁸ victory,²¹⁹ and peace.²²⁰ But more often, God is the lord or ruler of certain peoples or animate beings: angels,²²¹ souls,²²² mankind,²²³ troops,²²⁴ nobles,²²⁵

²¹⁶ E.g. "Him þa fægere frea æلميhtig, /ece drihten, andswarode" ["Then fairly the almighty lord, eternal lord, answered him"] (2353a-2354b).

²¹⁷ E.g. "Hie þa wuldres weard wædum gyrede" ["then the lord of glory dressed them in clothes"] (941), "and þæt word acwæð wuldres aldor" ["and the leader of glory spoke that word"] (639). For a treatment of the formulas associating heaven with glory (*wuldor*), as well as joy (*wynn*) and beauty (*wlite*), see Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Heaven and Fallen Angels in Old English." Hers is not a spatial analysis of what heaven is, but a look at certain formulas for describing heaven.

²¹⁸ E.g. "Heht þa lifes weard" ["then commanded life's guardian"] (144b), "lifes aldor" ["life's leader"] (113a).

²¹⁹ E.g. "sigora selfcyning" ["the king of victories himself"] (1797a), "swa him sigora weard" ["as the guardian of victories [commanded] him"] (1770b).

²²⁰ E.g. "gif me freoðo drihten" ["if the lord of peace [allows] me"] (1838b).

²²¹ E.g. "Frea engla heht" ["the lord of angels commanded"] (157b), "ac him brego engla" ["but the lord of angels [took] from him"] (181b).

²²² E.g. "gasta helme" ["protector of souls"] (1793a), "gasta waldend" ["ruler of souls"] (2175b).

²²³ E.g. "moncynnes weard" ["mankind's guardian"] (2758b).

²²⁴ E.g. "þæt him com from weroda drihtne" ["that came to him from the lord of troops"] (255b).

or even just all creatures.²²⁶ Nearly one fifth of the references to God as a ruler in the Old English *Genesis*, however, refer to the place over which his rule is exercised—heaven (expressed in its various terms). This way of describing God occurs forty-five times in all of *Genesis*, most frequently in the latter *A* portion, but also quite often in *B*. This distribution of objects for God’s lordship suggests the importance of God’s power, to be sure, but also emphasizes the significance of the place over which God exercises this power, specifically the place designated as heaven.²²⁷

Along with its status as an abstract territory to be ruled, the heaven of the Old English *Genesis* is a rather earth-like place as well. We have seen it described thus far as wide²²⁸ (10b, 28a, 87b) and possessing a northern portion (32b), which suggests both a vast landscape and the familiar terrestrial orientation system. In *Genesis B*, Eve, after eating the fruit, tells Adam that she can see God sitting in the south and east. This would place the space of heaven, not necessarily above the earth, but on the same level with it, just at some remove in one specific direction. Of course, Eve is only able to do this after eating of the fruit and receiving some kind of transcendent sight, or at least knowledge.²²⁹ Thus this heavenly space does not seem to be some part of the earth. It is also debatable

²²⁵ E.g. “æðelinga helm” [“nobles’ protector”] (1858a).

²²⁶ E.g. “cyning eallwihta” [“king of all creatures”] (978a), “helm eallwihta” [“protector of all creatures”] (113a).

²²⁷ Scott Thompson Smith cites the Old English *Boethius* as an example of the importance the Anglo-Saxons placed upon land as the necessary tool for a king’s power (3-4), thus controlling a land is necessary for God, as the supreme king, as well.

²²⁸ The earth is the place usually characterized as wide and expansive in Anglo-Saxon poetry (see below), though here this kind of landscape is extended to heaven as well, as Hugh Magennis also notes: “Heaven is presented in Old English poetry as a hall, a city and a homeland/home, but *Genesis A* also draws upon the idea of it as a broad kingdom” (144n2).

²²⁹ The scholarship supports this prospect as a vision, though there is disagreement about whether Eve sees the last judgment (Vickrey 90-1) or the creation (Michelet 71).

what exactly the heavenly land located in the east is in the allegorical Old English *Phoenix*:²³⁰ “Hæbbe ic gefrugnen þætte is feor heonan / eastdælum on æpelast londa” [“I have heard of that which is far from here, in eastern parts the noblest of lands”] (1-2). Nevertheless, the Old English heaven still seems to possess the orientation system of a very earthlike landscape, appropriate for rule by an Anglo-Saxon-like lord.

This familiar place is most developed in Anglo-Saxon terms with the descriptions of heaven as a hall. No doubt inspired by the various biblical descriptions of a heavenly city, the Anglo-Saxon site is most often characterized as a kind of constructed, enclosed, and peopled space. Adam calls it “landa betst” [“best of lands”] (795b), but while this place is illuminated (28a, 95a, 811a) like the heaven of John’s Apocalypse, the heaven in the Old English Genesis shares none of its other qualities of opulence—gold, jewels, and precious stones. Instead, the poem emphasizes the protective, fortified nature of heaven. The next section of *Genesis A*, which details the rest of God’s creative activity (104-234), including the creation of Adam and Eve in Paradise, often refers to heaven as a built structure, especially one of wood.²³¹ When God is creating on the second day, heaven is

²³⁰ A version of a Latin poem attributed to Lactantius of the fourth century (Fulk and Cain 140). The allegorical nature of the poem complicates its usefulness to us here. The paradise described in the poem can represent the garden of Eden from which humankind was expelled, or the world as redeemed by Christ, or even heaven after the Ascension. Daniel Calder considers the poem to be a vision which unites these differing allegorical perspectives (168), considering it a “middle world between heaven and earth” that hints at what heaven could be (175), though it reflects “two opposite worlds” at once (179). This blending that Calder calls attention to, though he does not term it such, is in some ways the same process of any conceptualization of heaven at all—relying upon the earthly to understand what cannot be directly perceived. The *Phoenix*, therefore, is just a more allegorically developed method of presenting heaven, and thus of slightly less interest to my project.

²³¹ In her study of the poetics of architectural imagery in Old English poetry, Lori Ann Garner notes that “the Old English account of Genesis even suggests that wood constitutes the architecture of heaven by employing the term *heofontimber*” (42).

“hyhtlic heofontimber” [“joyous heaven-timber”] (146a);²³² Satan refers to abandoning heaven’s “heahgetimbro” [“high buildings”] in *Genesis B* (739b). Similarly, in the Exeter Book poem *Guthlac A*, heaven is a refuge where “þa getimbru þe no tydriap” [“the structures which do not decay”] (18). The leader of the rebellious angels in *Genesis B* even calls upon this wooden conception to express his worthiness as a rival to God as he boasts “þæt he west and norð wyrcean ongunne, / trymede getimbro” [“that he, west and north, would begin to construct a building made strong”] (274a-75a). These references to heaven as a place of timber, along with the seats treated above, recall descriptions of the Anglo-Saxon hall. The treatment of heaven as such a hall is even more explicit in other poems. *Judgment Day I* proclaims that God “sele frætweð” [“prepares a hall”] (92b) for those who follow God’s teachings. *Christ and Satan* refers to heaven’s *heahseld* (43b, 47a, 207a, 371b), a term which means “high throne,” but can metonymically suggest the hall. The hall features reinforce the idea of heaven as a kingdom, but now specifically as a fortress—a secure, protected place inhabited by a lord.

Also in *Guthlac A*, the poet refers to heaven as a *ceaster* “þær se hyhsta / ealra cyninga cyning ceastrum wealdeð” [“where the highest king of all kings ruled the city”] (16b-17b). The *ceaster* is prototypically a “fortification, a fortified settlement” (*DOE* 1). While often used more generally to mean a city, *ceaster* usually implies city walls, and thus fortifications (*DOE* 2); it can even denote heaven by itself (*DOE* 2c, 2d), as it does in a couple of Old English Psalters.²³³ *Christ and Satan* even mentions heaven’s “beorhte

²³² Jennifer Neville does concede that this *heofontimber* of *Genesis A* might be an exception to her claim that Old English poetry does not visualize the cosmos (146), though she thinks it insufficient evidence for a cosmological system.

²³³ *Vespasian Psalter* 100.8 and *Canterbury Psalter* 47.9 (*DOE* “ceaster”).

burhweallas” [“bright fortress walls”] (294a) and terms it “sceldbyrig” [“city of refuge”] (308a) and “burhstýde” [“fortified town”] (362a). These three descriptions of heaven use the element *burh* [“fortified enclosure”] (*DOE A*), with the second example even containing a word for “shield.” *Genesis A* conveys heaven’s status as a place of strength quite simply with the repeated term *fæsten*. Just after the timbered heaven mentioned above, the poet calls the place “roderas fæsten” [“heavens’ fastness”] (148a). The Old English *fæsten* is often translated as “firmament” in modern translations of *Genesis A*, no doubt reflecting the Latin Vulgate.²³⁴ But while that translation makes sense, the term usually denotes a fastness, a physically strong place like a fortress or fortification, and this meaning would be readily available to the poem’s audience. The Anglo-Saxon heaven is not just a city, but a fortress or a hall whose protective nature seems to be of primary importance to the poets.²³⁵

To take the heaven metaphor further, not only is it a protective city or hall, it is also a home, a comforting enclosure.²³⁶ Heaven does appear as a home in the Latin scriptures, as in the passage from 2 Corinthians (5.1) quoted above. But the Anglo-

²³⁴ The poem does point to a closer tie to the Latin version of heaven in the term referenced above, “eðelstaðolas” (94a). A *staþol* is a foundation, but also a possible translation of the Latin *firmamentum* (*BT IV*).

²³⁵ See Kathryn Hume’s classic essay, “The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry” for a general discussion; Lori Garner’s second chapter of *Structuring Spaces: Oral Poetics and Architecture in Early Medieval England* (especially 42-51), for a discussion of the associate values of the hall for the Anglo-Saxons, using Beowulf’s Heorot as an example; and Hugh Magennis’s *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (especially chapter 2: “Hall and City, Feasting and Drinking: Images of Communal Life”), which explains that “[a]t the core of the imagery [of community] is the concept of the hall in the stronghold and of the feasting and communal life which are enacted there” (33). It is worth pointing out that feasting and drinking, the usual accompanying features of the hall, are absent from descriptions of heaven as a hall, implying only a partial conceptual blend of the metaphor—protection and comfort are part of heaven, revelry is not.

²³⁶ According to Nicolas Howe, while the hall functions as the center of warrior culture in heroic literature, it is not primarily a dwelling, or even a home (*Writing the Map* 55).

Saxons in their poetry go out of their way to portray heaven as a home, an enclosing, comforting, even native space.²³⁷ Old English features at least fourteen rough synonyms for the concept of home (Riedinger 51), a few of which appear in the Genesis poems. The concept of home transcends a structure the serves as a dwelling—Howe explains that “the Anglo-Saxons tended to define home more through the enduring presence of land than the transient existence of buildings” (*Writing the Map* 47). Heaven is a *ham* [“home”] to the Anglo-Saxons, as in a passage from *Genesis B*, “þam oðrum ham þe we ær cuðon, / hean on heofonrice” [“that other home which we knew before, high in heaven”] (375a-376a), and one from *Christ and Satan*, “hyhtlicra ham in heofonrice” [“higher home in heaven-kingdom”] (215). The home of heaven in *Genesis A* is also a *wic* [“dwelling place, residence”]: “wuldorfæstan wic” [“glory-strong dwelling”] (27a). And the Old English word *epel* [“one’s own country, one’s true home, home, homeland”] (*DOE* 1, 1a) twice appears in *Genesis A*: “wuldres eðel” [“homeland of glory”] (83a) and “eðelstaðolas” [“home-foundations”] (94a). *Epel* a particularly telling term for heaven as it characterizes the place not only as a home, but one which is native and true.²³⁸ Like *epel*, *geard* communicates the notion of home, especially as an enclosure; as we have seen heaven is said to contain “godlic geardas” (740a).

Finally, the same poem goes so far as to call heaven “sweglbosmas” [“heaven-bosoms”] (9b), as we have seen before. *Bosm* can mean, as it does here, any figurative

²³⁷ Dee Dyas considers heaven as a homeland in her discussion of pilgrimage in Old English literature, particularly devotional works like the *Christ* poems and saints lives like *Guthlac*. She argues: “Heaven is, quite simply, a homeland without end, without suffering or sorrow” (82).

²³⁸ An entry for *epel* in the *Rune Poem* exemplifies the nature and importance of home: “□ byþ oferleof æghwylcum men, / gif he mot ðær rihtes and gerysena on / brucan on bolde bleadum oftast” [“Home is most dear to any man if he might there enjoy what is right and proper in his home in lasting glory”] (71-73).

enclosure or space encompassed (*DOE* 2a), but certainly carries with it the intimacy of a very personal embrace. Similarly, *Andreas* speaks of paradise in terms of heaven as “boldwela fægrost, / hama hyhtlicost” [“fairest of wealth-houses, most joyous of homes”] (103b-104a). Heaven’s protecting home can also have a door which can be opened to allow the worthy inside (*Elene* 1229, *Phoenix* 12b, *Judgment Day II* 63b).²³⁹ Thus, this conception of a heaven is more than a merely protective space, but one so familiar, comforting, and welcoming as to take the form of those communal spaces most dear to the Anglo-Saxons—hall, home, and bosom. It is worth noting that with all of these conceptions for heaven, specific details are rather sparse, which can enhance its power and appeal.²⁴⁰

The Old English heaven we have seen developed thus far relies heavily on poetry of a scriptural or highly Christian nature, which raises the question of just how much the poetry in general is indebted to the Christian tradition for such a precise understanding of heaven which I have constructed. Poetry that is less explicitly scriptural or homiletic in its purposes, such as most of the wisdom poetry, reveals compatible, though less expansive references to heaven. But each poem can pick out available features of the heaven metaphors that are most appropriate to that poem’s meanings. Therefore, the way

²³⁹ Manish Sharma argues that *Guthlac A* can be divided into three sections by threshold imagery, including the gates of heaven: “first, at the gates of heaven in lines 1-29; second, on the brink of hell at lines 557-683; and third, again at the gates of heaven at lines 781-818” (186). She explains that physical and spiritual movement correlate in an anchoritic ideal of ascension (197), with Guthlac occupying a succession of threshold spaces (199).

²⁴⁰ Nicholas Howe explains:

The Old English poets are far more expressive in these catalogs [from elegiac poetry] of all that has gone from the earth than they are in their descriptions of the heavenly home. The heavenly home may be all the more mysteriously alluring in their poems for never being described in precise terms; indeed, that seems its beauty. (*Writing the Map* 60)

a poem expresses heaven can tell us something about its overall rhetorical goals. A few examples should demonstrate this potential.

Maxims I, a poem concerned with defining God, people, and things by positioning them in their proper place in the world or in relation to one another, refers to heaven mainly for its glory (7a, 132b), its brightness (41a), and its roominess (133a). This heaven is not a site for the struggle over salvation or the development of the nature of eternity, but more simply one of extreme qualities which reflects an awe and reverence for God. *Maxims II* uses heaven almost exclusively as a reference point for natural phenomena—birds are up “on lyfte” [“in the sky”] (38b-39a), showers fall “of heofenum” [“from the heavens”] (40b), stars shine brightly “on heofonum” [“in the heavens”] (49b), and people here on earth “under hrofas” [“under the roofs”] (65a) cannot understand God’s situation. The poem does mention a seat where God dwells (67), but for the most part the poem treats heaven as a purely physical place, one characterized only by what can be known to human beings, who indeed cannot fathom God’s place. To characterize heaven this way, with little reliance on the potential of the kingdom or fortress metaphors, reflects a very human point of view alongside the ineffability of God. The poetic *Solomon and Saturn II* relies heavily on heaven as a kingdom (384b, 493b, 497a) in the course of its dialogue, perhaps subtly supporting Solomon’s anachronistically Christian point of view. *Judgment Day I* emphasizes heaven’s height above all else (31, 48a, 59b, 97, 108a), a rather distancing, but appropriate perspective for a poem concerned with salvation. Finally, the heroic poem *Beowulf* rarely mentions heaven at all (only eleven times in 3182 lines does *heofon* appear), but when it does the reference is usually to things happening here under

the heavens (52a, 414a, 505a, 576a, 2015a).²⁴¹ Gnostic and formulaic references notwithstanding, *Beowulf* is just not very interested in the structure of creation and God's role in it. Instead, the poem is intently focused on what happens under heaven, on earth, that is, in its exploration of the fates of societies and the role of the individual in them. No matter how high, fortified, or comforting heaven might be, *Beowulf* does not care.²⁴²

Overall, the Anglo-Saxon portrayal of heaven seems to downplay the spaciousness of heaven²⁴³ in favor of is comforting and protective enclosure. The Anglo-Saxons certainly inherited the metaphor HEAVEN IS A CITY from the Vulgate, but they nearly always narrow the metaphor to exploit particularly confining entailments of the very general city structure. Since the Anglo-Saxons most preferred structures and therefore cities made of wood, rather than of stone, brick, or marble,²⁴⁴ this is the material noted in their literature on heaven, as we have seen.²⁴⁵ Since their concept of leadership involved the lord surrounded by retainers seated in a hall, these are features imported for heaven. Since the peoples of Anglo-Saxon England were involved in (and apparently fascinated by, if the heroic literature is any evidence) the struggle for land, their heaven is

²⁴¹ Other terms for heaven also appear in *Beowulf*, but infrequently and seldom to denote heaven as a place: *rodor* (four times), *swegel* (six), and *lyft* (five).

²⁴² One exception may be when the poem says that “heofon rece swealg” [“heaven swallowed the smoke”] (3155b) of Beowulf's pyre, perhaps a comment upon Christianity taking over the heroic world of the poem's Germanic past.

²⁴³ The wide heaven is alluded to only early in Genesis A, then sparsely in the rest of the poetic corpus. The speaker of Riddle 66, for example, claims to “wide ræce / ofer engla eard” [“reach widely over the home of angels”] (7b-8a).

²⁴⁴ Though this choice is usually thought to be one of necessity, Lori Ann Garner suggests it is one of genuine preference in her survey of Anglo-Saxon building in *Structuring Spaces: Oral Poetics and Architecture in Early Medieval England* (32-33).

²⁴⁵ *Genesis A* (146a), *Genesis B* (739b, 275a), *Guthlac A* (18).

a contested landscape.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, the way heaven, with its clear but permeable boundaries is described reflects a keen interest in, if not obsession for placement, especially enclosing placement. God is God because he is inside of and rules over heaven; earth is earth because it is below heaven. Those who are not worthy of heaven cannot exist in heaven. Heaven is a conceptual space, represented metaphorically as a city, but whose inhabitants and features carry symbolic significance. Where entities are in relation to the space of heaven—inside, outside, under, coming from, and going to—tells us a great deal about the value and status of these entities. The Anglo-Saxons inherited their metaphors for heaven from the Christian tradition, but, in their poetry, they tended to nativize them with the language of heroic poetry and the culture of the hall to create a timbered fortress of a heaven with God as its lord and angels as his retainers.

Hell: A Cold and Wet Prison (Still Fiery, Though)

When the rebellious angels are expelled from heaven in the accounts from the Old English Genesis poems discussed in the previous section, they are provided with another part of creation to inhabit—hell. Hell is a place more appropriate for these sinful figures, intended to reflect the nature of those who occupy it. Hell is a space defined in contrast to heaven, but surprisingly sharing some key features with it. While not referenced nearly as often in the corpus as heaven is, hell is a prominent feature of much Old English poetry. The Christian tradition of hell is likewise less well developed than that of heaven, with a less consistent structure and origin, though it does tend to be more literalized than heaven is, perhaps because it is more comprehensible place. The Hebrew scriptures use a couple of terms which have been taken as designating a place for the dead. One is *gehenna*, a

²⁴⁶ As in *Genesis A* (32b-34a, 65a-67a) and *Genesis B* (*passim*).

specific valley which once served as a receptacle for the bodies of criminals, but came to refer more generally to a grave (Turner 40-1).²⁴⁷ The other is *sheol*, often personified like the Greek Hades. The Latin Vulgate translates the term as *infernus*.²⁴⁸ In Isaiah, for example, the prophet curses the king of Babylon: “verumtamen ad infernum detraheris in profundum laci” [“nevertheless to hell you will be dragged into the depth of the pit”] (14.15). This hell is already a deep place below the earth, but it is more like an underground grave, lacking enough internal structure to really consider it a place or a specific metaphysical space.

The New Testament contains many oblique references to hell, given as *gehenna* or *infernus* in the Vulgate. The Gospel of Mark relates Jesus’s admonition to cut off a hand, foot, or eye if they lead one to sin, or else they will lead “in gehennam ignis inextinguibilis” [“into the hell of unquenchable fire”] (9.44). Matthew also has *gehenna* for hell (5.22, 5.29, 5.30, 10.28, 18.9, 23.15, 23.33), and the “lata porta” [“wide gate”] of Matthew (7.13) was taken to refer to hell in the Christian tradition (Turner 54), suggesting hell as built structure with a gate. The gospel also mentions a “caminum ignis” [“furnace of fire”] (13.42) that the sinners will be thrown into in the end times, another suggestion of the fiery hell. Later, Matthew identifies “tenebras exteriores” [“outer darkness”] (25.30) for a sinner’s fate. But, as Alice Turner mentions, it is not until Luke that hell is clearly a distinct place (55). In the story of Dives and Lazarus, Luke explains the rich man’s fate: “mortuus est autem et dives et sepultus est in inferno” [“but the rich man died and was buried in hell”] (16.22). He is in a place of fire (24), with a

²⁴⁷ Allusions to *gehenna*, the valley of Hinnon, occur at 2 Kings 23.10 and Jeremiah 7.31.

²⁴⁸ The Latin *infernus* refers literally to a low place, a fact Isidore notes in his *Etymologies* (14.9), a text well-known in Anglo-Saxon England.

chasm preventing escape to Lazarus's blessed place (26). Finally, in John's Apocalypse there is a fairly complex metaphorical expression of hell: "et dedit mare mortuos qui in eo erant et mors et infernus dederunt mortuos suos qui in ipsis erant... / et infernus et mors missi sunt in stagnum ignis" ["and the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and hell gave up their dead who were in them, and hell and death were sent into the pool of fire"] (20.13-14). First, the sea is the place for the dead, identified with hell and death. Then, seemingly personified, hell and death are in turn thrown into a pool of fire, apparently another hell. Turner explains that pagan figures of death are accommodated into a Christian conception of death in hell in this reflexive metaphor (65). The Christian Bible's version of hell is far from systematic, but seems to comprise a place below the earth, consisting of water and fire, or perhaps a blend of these two elements.

Later writers, including the church Fathers, refined these ideas somewhat, but would not develop a very precise structure of hell until the later Middle Ages, culminating in Dante's vision of the *Inferno*, though of course Dante is well past the point of influence for the Anglo-Saxons. I again turn to Augustine, as well as Gregory, for possible influence on Old English literature. In *The City of God*, Augustine discusses the apocalypse at great length throughout books 20-22, touching here and there on the punishment of the sinners, which at times treats hell. He refers to an abyss which John's Apocalypse says the devil is thrown into, but Augustine claims that "the abyss" symbolizes the innumerable multitude of the impious, in whose hearts there is a great depth of malignancy against the Church of God" (20.7). This interpretation is moving away from an understanding of hell as a physical place, and towards one that is embodied by those who sin. Augustine treats the passage from the Revelation cited above (20.13-

14) symbolically as well—the sea which gave up the dead is not hell, but the age we live in (20.15); likewise the “death” and “hell” which are cast into hell are symbols for the good and the wicked (20.15). Then, treating the passage from Matthew that refers to fire in hell (9.44), Augustine does seem to consider hell to be an actual place as he insists that the tortures through fire and the worm in hell are bodily (21.9). Though he does admit, speaking of the lake of fire, it is “a fire whose nature and whose situation in the world or the universe is, I conceive, known to no one, unless perhaps the spirit of God has revealed it to someone” (20.16). Gregory expresses a similar uncertainty in book four of the *Dialogi*. When asked whether hell is a place on the earth, Gregory responds:

Touching this point I dare not rashly define anything: for some have been of opinion that hell was in some place upon the earth; and others think that it is under the earth: but then this doubt ariseth, for if it be therefore called hell, or an infernal place, because it is below, then as the earth is distant from heaven, so likewise should hell be distant from the earth. (4.42)

That hell is distant from the earth seems to be the only thing Gregory will commit to here. The Anglo-Saxons, therefore, through the Latin scriptures and the intellectual tradition of the Fathers, did not inherit a very well-developed picture of hell as a place. Nor did they innovate much in their metaphors for expressing hell. But they were selective in which features of hell to use in references and descriptions of hell. The analysis which follows, then, will focus on the effects of the choices made among available metaphors for hell.

The two most thorough treatments of hell²⁴⁹ in Old English poetry are found in the *Genesis* poems treated at length in the discussion of heaven, and in *Christ and Satan*, which also recounts Satan's expulsion from heaven and his newfound possession of hell. *Genesis A* offers two descriptions of hell early in the poem as it recounts the rebellion of the angels. First God creates the new place of hell for the traitors:

Sceop þam werlogan
wræcligne ham weorce to leane,
helleheafas, hearde niðas.
Heht þæt witehus wræcna bidan,
deop, dreama leas, drihten ure,
gasta weardas, þa he hit geare wiste,
synnihte beseald, susle geinnod,
geondfolen fyre and færcyle,
rece and reade lege. Heht þa geond þæt rædlease hof
weaxan witebrogan. (36b-45a)

[God shaped for the faithless an exile home as reward for his work, hell-wailings, cruel troubles. Our lord ordered guardians of spirits to endure that torment-house of exiles, deep, without joys, when he knew it ready, surrounded with everlasting night, filled with torment, filled through with fire and terrible cold, with smoke and red flame. Then he commanded horrid-torment grow throughout that house for the miserable ones.]

²⁴⁹ The Old English word *hell* is feminine, which has encouraged one scholar to attempt to trace its root back to a personified figure, the Queen Hel, different from the Old Norse Hel of Snorri and others (Bell 264).

There are three nouns here that describe what kind of place hell is—*ham*, *hus*, and *hof*. These word, alliterating with *hell*, are all terms for built structures that function as dwelling places (what a homey hell!). Of course, we cannot expect the Anglo-Saxons to necessarily have the same pleasant associations with the idea of a home that we do now (OED 2b), but the second term can also refer to a family, and the third to a hall, both quite positive things in Old English literature. And we have seen heaven described as a home as well.²⁵⁰ Granted, these homey references to hell are qualified with very negative descriptors—the *ham* is *wræclīc* [“wretched, miserable”], the *hus* is one of *wite* [“pain, punishment, torment”], and the *hof* is the site of growing *witebroga* [“penal horror, a horrid punishment or torment”] (BT).²⁵¹ Nevertheless, hell in this passage is exclusively a home or house, suggesting a structural metaphor HELL IS A HOME. Other physical qualities arise from this description—this hell is deep (40a), dark (42a), fiery (43a, 44a), smoky (44a), and cold (43b). The location of hell far below in a dark and fiery place is familiar from scripture, but its coldness is unusual (I will return to this point shortly).

Soon following in *Genesis A*, after God has exiled the angels, they experience hell directly:

Heo on wrace syððan
seomodon swearte, siðe ne þorfton
hlude hlihhan, ac heo helltregum
werige wunodon and wean cuðon,

²⁵⁰ See Nicholas Howe’s “Looking for Home in Anglo-Saxon England” for another treatment of the value of home to the Anglo-Saxons.

²⁵¹ According to David Johnson, a “five horrors of hell” motif existed in early medieval England, appearing in homilies in Old English, particularly clear in Vercelli 9 (425). These horrors take the form of the absence of certain joys, differing from the positive presence of horrors in this Old English account.

sar and sorge, susl þrowedon
þystrum beþeahte, þearl æfterlean
þæs þe heo ongunnon wið gode winnan. (71b-77b)

[Afterwards, in exile-punishment, they rested in darkness, had no way to
laugh loudly, but they with hell-torments dwelled wearily and knew woe,
sore and sorrowful, suffered torment, covered in darkness, severe after-
reward because they had begun to strive with God.]

Note that this passage does not once describe hell as any kind of home or building—it is more simply a place in which exile, darkness, torment, woe, and other such miseries occur. Furthermore, the Old English term *hell* is never used in *Genesis A* to refer directly to the place. Instead, the word *hell* only appears once in a compound describing the sounds there (38a). The poem shifts from more physical descriptions (as a house) to more subjective qualities (that is, things which are experienced subjectively by sentient beings) moves us away from God's role as builder toward the devils' experience of misery. Hell is a structured house or home only from God's point of view, not from that of the suffering devils.

Genesis B treats hell at much greater lengths. This poem repeats the story of the expulsion from heaven and exile to hell, but with significant differences from *Genesis A* in the descriptions of hell. For one thing, this treatment is much longer, with about two hundred and thirty lines (302b-531a) devoted to hell, from the descent of the fallen angels, to their laments, to their plans to corrupt Adam and Eve. Another important difference in this section is that *hell*, as a noun, is now clearly the name of the place the devils inhabit. The place has assumed a more reified status to be repeatedly so named—

fifteen times as a simplex term for location in this span.²⁵² Nowhere in *Genesis B* is hell called any kind of home, house, or dwelling (*ham*, *hus*, *hof*, *wic*, *epel*, etc.)—the HELL IS A HOME metaphor is not active in this poem.²⁵³ Instead, other concepts shoulder the burden for communicating hell beyond its simple name.

Like *Genesis A*, though, *Genesis B* defines hell, in the initial narrative report (302b-55b), as dark (312b, 345b), hot (324a, 331a), fiery (314b, 316b, 322a, 325a, 330b), smoky (325b, 326a), and cold (316a). But one feature tends to dominate these descriptions—hell’s topographical depth. As *Genesis A* terms hell as deep (40a), in *Genesis B*, God “hine on helle wearp, / on þa deopan dala” [“threw him [Satan] into hell in the deep dale”] (304b-05a). Hell is deep and defined as a pit or valley. The poet also speaks of Satan, expelled from heaven: “Forþon he sceolde grund gesecean” [“Therefore he must seek the ground”] (302b). And God “het hine þære sweartan hell / grundes gyman” [“commanded him to govern that dark ground of hell”] (345b-46a) and again “gieman þæs grundes” [“govern that ground”] (349a). These references to the *grund* of hell are a little misleading with the modern sense of *ground* as a guide. In Old English, *grund* is not merely the earth or the base of something, but it is primarily “the bottom, lowest part of anything” (DOE A). Often translated as “abyss,” this *grund* is hell as the lowest, deepest part of a landscape. Likewise, the devils “wæron þa befeallene fyre to botme / on þa hatan hell” [“were fallen into the depth of fire in the hot hell”] (330a-31a), with *botm* carrying its modern sense, as well as “depth” and “abyss” for hell (DOE 3). The angry God threw Satan “niðer on þæt niobedd” [“down into that corpse-bed”] (343a).

²⁵² 304b, 308a, 312b, 319b, 324b, 331a, 345b, 348a, 362a, 368a, 373b, 377a, 389a, 406b, 529b.

²⁵³ Except possibly when Satan refers to heaven as “þam oðrum ham” [“the other home”] (357a). Heaven is the home he mentions, but calling it an “other” home implies that the hell they now occupy is a home too.

Niðer indicates the direction of hell as down, while hell becomes a bed for a corpse, another low-lying location. In contrast to *Genesis A*'s HELL IS A HOME metaphor, *Genesis B* here emphasizes that hell is a deep, low place. This change creates a shift in our appraisal of the devils from beings who live in a home (however terrible that home is), to those who just fall low (with all the negative value associations of that orientation).

When Satan speaks directly in *Genesis B*, to his fellow fallen angels, the environment of the surrounding hell takes up a good deal of his speech. He relies on the hell imagery and features we have already seen,²⁵⁴ but pays careful attention to the aspect of hell as an enclosure, specifically a narrow, constrictive one that suggests the structural metaphor HELL IS A PRISON.²⁵⁵ Satan's first statement refers to hell as "þæs ænga styde" ["this narrow place"] (356a), which is very unlike "þam oðrum ham" ["the other home"] (357a), or heaven, that they knew before. The uncommon, mostly poetic adjective *enge* means "narrow, close, constrained, confined" (DOE 1), but is so often used to describe hell that the DOE devotes a sub-sense to "describing the narrow confines of Hell" (1.a.i). Satan also complains that

Ac licgað me ymbe irenbenda,
rideð racentan sal. Ic eom rices leas;
habbað me swa hearde helle clommas
fæste befangen. (371a-74a)

²⁵⁴ In his direct speech (356-441), Satan describes hell as deep (361a, 407a, 421a), fiery (361a, 374b, 376b, 437a), hot (362b, 377a, 383b, 389b, 439a), and dark (389b, 391a).

²⁵⁵ As Lori Garner notes, "the line between refuge and prison is quite blurry" (84), which helps account for both the dual nature of hell as home and prison, as well as its architectural similarity with heaven. Garner also compares the prison imagery of hell to that of the real prisons of *Juliana*, *Andreas*, and *Elene* (83-4).

[But iron-bonds lie about me, a cord of chains rides me. I am without a kingdom; cruel hell bonds have firmly confined me.]

This overpowering statement of confinement, echoed later in the speech (377b-78a, 382a-84a), follow naturally from the idea of hell as a prison with its fetters and chains and Satan its prisoner. It is not entirely clear, either, whether these references to bondage refer exclusively to chains on the person of Satan, or if they could describe the place of hell itself. One other feature enters the discussion as Satan alludes to doors of this hell: Satan says that “synt þissa heldora / wegas forworhte” [“the ways through these hell-gates are barred”] (380b-81a); and he seeks a messenger devil who can escape and “cuman þurh þas clustro” [“come out through the locks”] (416a). And following Satan’s speech, the messenger “hwearf him þurh þa helldora” [“departed himself through the hell-doors”] (447b). The confined space, the chains, and the gates all follow from the prison metaphor.

HELL IS A PRISON is naturally the primary metaphor that concerns Satan in *Genesis B* as he must reside in the place, unable to leave. But the hell-as-prison idea is also one that connects it to heaven—both spaces are enclosed with gates marking a point of passage into or out of the realm. By emphasizing this commonality, I am not claiming that the Anglo-Saxons would have viewed heaven and hell as similar places, but I do suggest a common template for constructing a metaphysical realm—it must have a structure of an enclosed place with a point of access and a spatial relation to this world (heaven is up, hell is down). Most commonly hell is a place, even a home as heaven is, but one narrow and constricted, as in the phrases from *Juliana*, “engan ham” [“narrow home”] (323a) and “grorn-hofe” [“sorrow-house”] (324a), the only two terms that directly denote the place during the demon’s confession to the saint. Cynewulf called

upon the most basic Anglo-Saxon idea of hell to efficiently describe the place in this poem of the saint Juliana.

There is one further characterization of hell in *Genesis B*. Adam ascribes animate qualities to the place when he asks Eve, “Gesyhst þu nu þa sweartan helle / grædige and gifre. Nu þu hie grimman meaht / heonane gehyran” [“Do you see now the dark hell, greedy and voracious. Now you can hear it roaring from here”] (792b-94a). This hell evokes the convention of the hell mouth, as hell is capable of feeling hunger and expressing rage. The hell mouth tradition is not common in Old English poetry, occurring mainly in small manuscript miniatures for devotional texts, but also in illustrations of the Old English *Genesis*. Gary Schmidt, however, explains, “in every appearance in Anglo-Saxon culture, the hell mouth lacked the complexity and subtlety of many other Anglo-Saxon images” (61).²⁵⁶ In fact, the Anglo-Saxons would even omit existing references to the hell mouth in their translations into vernacular poetry. The Old English *Guthlac* poems make no mention of the hell mouth described in Felix’s 8th century Latin *vita*, which even served as a direct source for *Guthlac B* (Schmidt 62-3). One other Old English poem makes a reference to the hell mouth, *Christ III*, but I postpone discussion of that poem until Chapter V.

Christ and Satan spends a great deal of time on hell. Not only is hell clearly a physical place in this poem, but its status as a place is vitally important. This poem uses the familiar metaphors and images for hell as a place of fire and torment, but really seems to focus on hell as another place, a deep, enclosed space, especially as a home, albeit a

²⁵⁶ For a full discussion, see Gary Schmidt’s chapter on the Anglo-Saxon images from his book, *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century*.

parody of one. Early in the poem, the speaker recounts the fall of the rebellious angels, saying they went “in þæt atole scref, / þær heo brynewelme bidan sceolden” [“into that terrible cave, where they must endure burning-fire”] (26b-27b). This hell is unsurprisingly underground, as suggested by the cave, and overwhelming with fire. Then the poet describes the situation “in ðone deopan wælm / niðær undær nessas in ðone neowlan grund” [“in the deep flames down underground into the deep abyss”] (30b-31b). Now the poem dwells on the depth of hell, emphasizing just how far from the earth it is. Satan’s first speech of the poem reveals his particular perception of hell—he resorts most often to language of bondage (38b-39a, 49a), yet always coupled with reference to home (38a, 49b). This coincidence portrays hell as the prison home we have seen in *Genesis B*. Satan’s second speech, in response to his reproachful followers, continues this focus as he mentions hell as a home five times in this forty-five line address, though mostly in unflattering terms—it is a “helle ham” [“hell home”] (88), a “hæftum ham” [“bondage home”] (91), an “atola ham” [“terrible home”] (95b), a “walica ham” [“woeful home”] (99a), and a “dimman ham” [“dark home”] (110b). Satan characterizes his dwelling as a terrible place, but nevertheless his home, an especially poignant attitude in contrast to the *eard* [“native home”] he has lost (92a) and will never be granted again (115b). Satan’s language for hell continues in this vein, even referring to hell as a “sidan sele” [“wide hall”] (130a), invoking the breadth of heaven, as well as that most precious of structures to the Anglo-Saxons, the hall.

Control of a homeland is the central issue in *Christ and Satan*. Satan speaks of hell only in terms of the degree it functions as a home to him. He also speaks of his rebellion in heaven this way: “ða gewearð usic þæt we woldon swa / drihten adrifan of

þam deoran ham, / cyning of cestre” [“then it was for us that we wished to drive the lord from the beloved home, the king from his city”] (254a-56a). In the last part of the poem, Satan tempts Christ with dominion over the earth and even offers “burh and breotone bold to gewearde, / rodora rices” [“the city and broad home of heavens’ kingdom to rule”] (686a-87a). This temptation is for a wide homeland, over earth and heaven, but Christ refuses, instead commanding Satan to return to his own hellish home and measure it:

Wite þu eac, awyrgda, hu wid and sid
helheoðo dreorig, and mid hondum amet.
Grip wið þæs grundes; gang þonne swa
oððæt þu þone ymbhwyrft alne cunne,
and ærest amet ufan to grunde,
and hu sid seo se swarta eðm.
Wast þu þonne þe geornor þæt þu wið god wunne,
seoððan þu þonne hafast handum ametene
hu heh and deop hell inneward seo,
grim græfhus. Gong ricene to,
ær twa seondon tida agongene,
þæt ðu merced hus amenen hæbbe (698a-709b)

[Know you also, accursed one, how wide and broad the horrible hell-hall is, and measure it with your hands. Try to get to the bottom; go then until you know all the region, and first measure from top to bottom and how wide the black air is. You will know then better that you struggled with

God after you have then measure with your hands how high and deep hell
is inside, grim grave-house. Go quickly to it before two hours are gone, so
that you have measured your designated house.]

Part of Satan's punishment is the act of measuring hell, so that he might know and suffer every inch of it.²⁵⁷ This hellish domain, however, does not follow the usual metaphors for hell, apart from its being Satan's home. No longer narrow and constraining, this hell is immense, with heights and depths of a "hund þusenda / mila gemearcodes" ["hundred thousand miles measured"] (720b-21a) from hell's door to the bottom. Despite Christ's repeated order to measure the width and breadth of hell, this distance seems to be vertical, from top to bottom. The path of measure could be only sloping mildly down, thus yielding hell's width, but this is not clear from the poem. In any case, the land Satan can control is marked by extremes of depth at the close of *Christ and Satan*. Why hell should develop this feature is unclear, but could perhaps have to do again with distance from earth, with the physical implying the spiritual; or hell's size could reflect the number of potential sinners to inhabit it. Either interpretation presents a hell that looms ominously without boundaries, not painful so much for its bondage, but for its isolation, openness, and threat of exile, a condition of great terror in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons.

Other Old English poems feature references to hell that choose from the available metaphorical features of the place outlined above to portray a more narrowly focused conception of hell, but they can also develop entailments or unexpected attributes of the

²⁵⁷ Tom Hill finds no biblical, exegetical, or apocryphal source for the idea of Satan measuring hell ("Measure" 410-1); Hill proposes then that this command is a parody of the godly role he seeks to usurp (412). Instead of functioning as *meotod*, an Old English epithet for God that literally means "measurer" as it captures God's creative power, Satan must measure his own, more limited domain (412).

place. *Descent into Hell*, for example, portrays hell almost exclusively as a fortress. This Exeter Book poem recounts Christ's harrowing of hell after his burial: "wolde heofona helm helle weallas / forbrecan ond forbygan, þære burge þrym / onginnan reafian" ["the protector of heaven intended to shatter and bend open hell's walls, to start to plunder the host in that fortress"] (34a-36a). This hell is a *burh*, a fortified enclosure, with protective walls containing its host. Christ's approach yields submission of the place itself: he would not need to lead armed men "to þam burggeatum ... ac þa locu feollan, / clustor of þam ceastrum" ["to those fortress-gates, but the locks fell down, bars from the city"] (38b-40a). This hell is a home of sorts, though a military one, but more like a prison with bars to keep its occupants in. A more powerful image than just the opening of a prison, the destruction of a fortress-city puts Christ on the level of warrior king, elevating and appropriating his action to that of heroic literature.²⁵⁸ Depicting hell as a fortress is a rhetorical strategy to help illustrate Christ's power.²⁵⁹

The two Old English poems called *Judgment Day* each feature a description of hell. *Judgment Day I*, from the Exeter Book, gives a tidy encapsulation (18-29) of the Anglo-Saxon hell we have seen so far: hell is a fiery (18b), hot (22b), narrow (22a), locked (20b), a home (24a), low (24b), and dark (19b-20a, 26b). Nothing unusual or highly focused stands out in this description. On the other hand, *Judgment Day II*, a longer poem from CCC 201, presents a more developed treatment of hell (187-246)

²⁵⁸ Jessica Brantley argues that this poem is actually un-heroic, "a remarkably peaceful vision of divine triumph" (45), with its absence of "the usual machinery of epic battle or even a characterization of the Adversary" (45). She asserts that "[t]his triumph is explicitly spiritual and not physical" (46). These claims do not ring very true to me—the emphasis on hell as a fortress with walls and gates strongly evoke physical battle. There may be no physical battle involved, but I would say that Christ's triumph is explicitly architectural, with the intrusion of a space the clear sign of his physical power.

²⁵⁹ This passage from *Descent into Hell* echoes Psalm 85.13: "eruisti animam meam de inferno extremo" ["you have dug up my soul from the outer hell"].

with one particularly interesting focus: “þær synt to sorge ætsomne gemenged / se þrosma lig and se þrece gicela, / swiðe hat and ceald helle tomiddes” [“there, for grief, the fire of smoke and the force of icicles, very hot and very cold, are mixed together in hell’s middle”] (191a-93b). This emphasis on the extremes of climate and temperature, repeated immediately (194a-96b, 206a), reflects the single reference to cold in *Genesis A* (42a). Extreme heat and cold are of course both painful torments, but the reason this poem should juxtapose them so is perhaps a cruel parody of judgment for the damned—they once had the choice of good and evil, were then separated from the good, and now have another choice, though each option, hot and cold, is equally painful.

The “Whale” poem from the allegorical *Physiologus* introduces another aspect of hell. The poem speaks of the whale, itself an allegory for the devil, who “helle seceð, / goda geasne, grundleasne wylm / under mistglome, [“deprived of good, seeks hell, in the bottomless surging water, under the mist-gloom”] (45b-47a). Later the poem relates how the whale “helle ontyneð” [“opens hell”] (68b) and delivers its captives “in þam fæstenne” [“into the fastness”] (71b) and “æt þam edwylme” [“into the whirlpool”] (73a). Hell being deep and violent under the water and darkness is not only consistent with the allegory of this particular poem, but it is also perfectly in keeping with the understanding of hell found elsewhere in the poetry, as we have seen. The location of the water as hellish, however, is something we have not yet encountered in Old English poetry. But this conception is not uniquely conditioned by the local allegory of the poem since it does appear in prose texts.

Water is involved in the Anglo-Saxon vision of hell from Blickling Homily 17, a sermon occasioned by the dedication of a church to Saint Michael. This homily includes

a vision of hell based on the *Visio St. Pauli*, an apocryphal apocalyptic text from the 4th century:

Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wæteru niðer gewitað, and he þær geseah ofer ðam wætere sumne harne stan. wæron norð of ðam stane aweaxene swiðe hrimige bearwas, and ðær wæron þiestru genipu, and under þam stane wæs nicra eardung and wearga. he geseah þæt on ðam clife hangodon on ðam isigean bearwum manige swearte sawla be heora handum gebundne, and þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron, swa swa grædig wulf. And þæt wæter wæs sweart under þam clife neoðan, and betweox þam clife on ðam wætere wæron swelce twelf mila. And ðonne ða twigu forburston þonne gewiton þa sawla niðer þa þe on ðam twigum hangodon, and him onfengon ða nicras. Ðis ðonne wæron ða sawla þa ðe her on worulde mid unrihte gefirenode wæron, and ðæs noldon geswican ær heora lifes ende.

[So Saint Paul was looking into the northward part of this middle-region, where all the waters depart down, and there he saw over the water a certain hoary stone. And there were grown north of the stone very frosty woods, and there were dark mists, and under the stone was the dwelling of monsters and evil-spirits. And he saw that on the cliff there hung in the icy woods many black souls, by their hands bound, and the fiends in likeness of the monsters were gripping them, like a greedy wolf. And the water was black under the cliff from below, and between the cliff and the water were

about twelve miles. And when the branches burst then the souls departed down there who hung on the branches, and the monsters received them.

These then were the souls who here in this world were made sinful with injustice, and would-not cease it before their life's end.]

This version of hell is located in, or very near to, this world, in its extreme northern parts. The prevailing characteristics of this hell are depth, coldness, and wetness.²⁶⁰ The depth, even at twelve miles, is no surprise, as it asserts that, though it can be reached from the earth, hell is another space distinct from that in which we live. While the source material from the *Visio St. Pauli* represents a different culture, its images would be especially appropriate for the Anglo-Saxons. The cold and wet climate would seem to represent hardship more familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, who would be unlikely to have experienced an earthly cataclysm of fire, such as a volcanic eruption, or intense heat. The physical dangers of England, a northern land surrounded by sea, would be expected to involve things like cold and water, and would therefore make effective rhetoric for a homily treating the horror of hell. Hell is a cold and wet place.

This cold and wet hell survives in the poetry beyond the allegorical “Whale” and the odd line of biblical verse,²⁶¹ though in an indirect way. The passage from Blickling

²⁶⁰ Bede's “Vision of Drythelm” (*Historia ecclesiastica* 5.12) also portrays a hell that is dark and alternatively hot and fiery and cold and icy. See Daniel Anlezark's account of “The Fall of the Angels in *Solomon and Saturn II*” for a review of the Anglo-Saxon belief in a cold hell (129-31).

²⁶¹ We have seen *Genesis A* referred to the cold (43b), but so does *Christ and Satan* (131a, 635b).

Homily 17 is widely thought to have inspired the description of Grendel's mere in *Beowulf*.²⁶²

Hie dygel lond
warigeað, wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,
frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream
under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
milgemeanres þæt se mere standeð;
ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
wudu wirtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
fyr on flode. (1357b-66a)

[They guard a secret land, wolf-slopes, windy headlands, dangerous fen-paths, where a mountain-stream departs down under the cliffs' mists, water under the earth. It is not far from here in mile-distance that the mere stands; over that hangs ice-covered trees, a wood strong of root covers over the water, where one may each night see evil-wonders, fire in the water.]

The lake where the Grendelkin live is a cold place, with fire on its water. And earlier, the poet refers to Grendel as "feond in helle" ["an enemy in hell"] (101a).²⁶³ For the

²⁶² See Hugh Magennis (134-35) for a useful survey of the evidence for and problems with this association. Magennis (135-38) and Anlezark ("Poisoned Places") argue for a classical source for this section of *Beowulf*, following Vergil and an Avernian tradition.

²⁶³ The translation of this phrase is not without problems, as many seek to avoid the positional implications of the literal sense. See Malcolm Andrew's "Grendel in Hell" for a review of this debate, as well as his

description of his home, the poet invokes the image of hell by blending a number of its available images and metaphorical structures to overwhelming infernal effect. The understanding of hell as cold, wet, deep, low, and fiery combines with the metaphor HELL IS A HOME (as Grendel and his mother make their abode there). The major Old English metaphor for hell which is missing in *Beowulf* is HELL IS A PRISON, likely because the monsters are anything but trapped there. Their hell is one that cannot contain their depredations, as the Danes of the poem know all too well. Even the hiddenness of the mere lends it a hellish quality in its echoes of the Patristic uncertainty of the location for hell.²⁶⁴ This poetic example, while not literally a hell, shows what use a poet can make of the metaphors to communicate feelings and associations subtly and efficiently. Making this monstrous home a hell, confers upon Grendel and his mother the status of devil, granting their involvement in the affairs of the worldly Danes a grander cosmic significance—this is no ordinary feud, but something downright hellish, with the fates of souls at stake.

A Middle Earth: Safe House or Wide Plain?

The two spaces of creation we have already discussed, heaven and hell, are abstract concepts which require metaphor to give them the substance necessary to be understood and even considered to be real. The natures of the spaces which these two places take the form of tell us something about their conceptual, theological, and rhetorical uses. But there is a third space of this imagined cosmos that is not

solution that the line invokes the patristic notion that “the nature of hell and the mentality of the sinner” are connected (408), so that, much like Milton’s Satan, Grendel carries hell with him (409).

²⁶⁴ Fabienne Michelet notes the cave’s occupying “a shifting and ambiguous place in *Beowulf*’s poetic geography” (82), which she claims works for the confusion between the worlds of men and of monsters (82-3), the hall and the *anti*-hall (84), order and chaos (91).

fundamentally an abstract place—the earth is a very real, very physical space. The Anglo-Saxons likely would have considered all three levels of creation real and physical, of course, but they must have understood this world to be something different due to its everyday and immediate availability to the senses. The Anglo-Saxons were certainly interested in the world around them. In the opening to his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, Bede defines the land of Britain, reporting its length of 800 miles, its breadth of 200 miles, and its total coastline of 3600 miles (1.1). He continues to explain the productive capabilities of the land—its grain and timber, its pastures, its rivers and springs, its metals and its cities (1.1).²⁶⁵ This practical representation of the land with its precise dimensions and economic values, however, is not the way that the earth usually appears in Old English poetry. The “real” world is just as susceptible to metaphor as the “imagined” worlds of heaven and hell.

According to Jennifer Neville, however, the Anglo-Saxons did not even have a term or concept for what we call the natural world. They do of course deal with the elements of what we call the natural world, but not as clearly distinguished from the supernatural or the human. Anglo-Saxon natural representations represent human constructions like religion, though not in a very coherent manner (considering five centuries of writings, from multiple traditions). Neville explains:

What emerges is that the representation of the ‘natural world’ is never an end in itself and is always ancillary to other issues. It acts as a literary

²⁶⁵ Catherine Clarke warns us: “Although later medieval texts and modern critics look back to Bede as authoritative point of origin, his description of Britain is already a complex and fraught nexus of intertextualities” (5). Bede’s Britain is thus “the idealised, commodified, colonial landscape” (5). I merely cite Bede as one example of a kind of representation for the world to serve as contrast to more abstract and poetic ones.

device, used to define what were apparently more important issues: the state of humanity and its position in the universe, the establishment and maintenance of society, the power of extraordinary individuals, the proximity of the deity to creation and the ability of writing to control and limit information. (18)

Neville confirms Howe's claim that the world as presented in Old English texts is a value-laden construction, based only loosely on the physical world surrounding the Anglo-Saxons. They are both right, but I will attempt to show that there were several standard metaphorical versions of the earth which the Anglo-Saxons poets called upon for particular purposes in their works— EARTH IS A MIDDLE, EARTH IS A BUILDING, and EARTH IS A WIDE PLAIN.²⁶⁶

In *Cædmon's Hymn*, the world that God creates for men is called “middangeard” [“middle-region”] (7a). This designation appears more than any other in the corpus to refer to the earth as part of Creation. Counting all instances of variant spellings, the term occurs 1744 times, mostly in prose, though fairly common in the poetry too.

Middangeard was the default way of talking about this world, and the components of the term are revealing. The alternating spellings of the second element, *geard* and *eard*, are distinct words, according to the DOE, but their sense overlap a great deal. *Geard* is primarily a “dwelling-place, enclosure; home, abode” (1), but also a “country, region, district” (2) and even a “fence, hedge” (3). *Eard*, the more common word in the corpus, is

²⁶⁶ In Nicholas Howe's three-part division of landscape categories—inherited, invented, imagined—the metaphors I propose operate mainly in terms of the imagined: “To imagine a landscape is to relate the features of one's topography to one's psychological and spiritual lives; it means that the seemingly stable distinctions between the ‘in here’ of the self and the ‘out there’ of the landscape can sometimes be crossed or confused for expressive purposes” (“Landscape” 91).

foremost a “dwelling-place” (1), with a frequent sub-sense of a “country, region, native land” (1.a), and secondarily a “circumscribed area of land” (2). These words have in common the sense of a dwelling place, especially one on the large scale of a country. Thus the earth as some kind of *geard* is understood for its capacity to serve as the place where people live, on a large scale. The first element of *middangeard* signifies a middle. It should be clear now that this middle refers to the structure of the Christian and Anglo-Saxon cosmos, locating the earth vertically in between heaven and hell. There are obvious theological and metaphorical reasons for this—good (heaven) is up, bad (hell) is down, with we on earth given the opportunity to move one direction or the other. But one would suspect that the term pre-dates the conversion to Christianity and thus conveys a different sense of centrality. Another reason for the insistence on the identity of the earth as a middle space could be related to the same sense of enclosure we see over and over again in these metaphors for abstract concepts. Just as heaven and hell are enclosures, be they cities, buildings, or prisons, the earth is enclosed as well. Being in the middle necessarily implies something surrounding it. *Middangeard* suggests that the surroundings are heaven and hell in a Christian context, but some other, not clearly defined realms surround the anthropocentric earth in an earlier sense of the term, likely related to the Old Norse realms of Asgard and Jotunheim. In both systems, though, the earth is a space both well-defined and well-protected.

Earl Anderson identifies a second way that the earth can be represented metaphorically: “the natural world can be described using architectural terms” (70); fortresses, halls, roofs, and doors populate accounts of the natural world in Old English poetry (71-72). We’ve already seen these architectural features applied to heaven and

hell, but they occur in the natural world of the earth as well, and, like the notion of being in the middle of Creation, also suggest a very defensive and protective outlook. The prototype most often cited for this conception of the world is Bede's parable of the sparrow from the *Historia ecclesiastica*. When King Edwin considers adopting Christianity, one of his advisors urges him on:

[W]hen we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your thegns and counsellors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. (2.13)

In this vision, life is like a hall, with all of its comforting warmth and protective enclosure. Bede equates life with the earth in this story, noting that people appear "on *earth* for a little while," but do not know what came before this *life*. The wintry storm outside the hall is the part of cosmos unknown to the pagan Anglo-Saxons, but even though the storm replaced in Christianity with the heaven and hell we have already discussed, the structure of the earth as a hall or building remained in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

In fact, we have already seen a common reflex of the EARTH IS A BUILDING metaphor in our discussion of heaven. One of the ways in which heaven is portrayed has implications for the structure of the earth as well. Not only is the protective fortress of heaven a fastness, but *Genesis A* mentions an earthly space “under fæstenne folca hrofes” [“under the fastness of the peoples’ roof”] (153). This fastness equates that heavenly structure with a roof for the people, and it is quite common, even formulaic, to refer to heaven or the sky as an upper cover for this world, as we noted in *Cædmon’s Hymn*. The Old English *Genesis* does this three times: in the creation story just cited (153b), in Satan’s speech of temptation, when he says he knows well “heah heofona gehlidu” [“high heavens’ lids”] (582b), and in God’s actions after the Fall, when he is said to let be “hyrstedne hrof halgum tunglum” [“the roof adorned with holy stars”] (956). The implied metaphor, HEAVEN IS A ROOF, is consistent with the idea that heaven is a place of a metaphorically physical nature—in addition to its landscape and fortifications, its bottom is a solid, protective feature as well. It is an interesting question to consider what this metaphor says about the relationship between heaven and earth. On the one hand, it treats the earth as meaningful only with respect to heaven. The repeated “under” formula always keeps our attention on the overall structure of creation and the relationship between its domains, subordinating the earth to heaven in a move of proper Christian devotion and submission. On the other hand, to consider heaven to be the earth’s roof actually subordinates the former to the latter—a roof is only one component of a building. If it consists of everything under a roof, the earth would seem to be the more important part of the cosmological structure.

The expression “heaven’s roof” actually say more about the earth than heaven. A HEAVEN IS A ROOF metaphor must follow from a metaphor EARTH IS A BUILDING. Bede even compares God’s creation of the universe to the construction of a building in his *In Genesim*: “when we build a house, at the beginning of the job we prepare the building materials, and after this beginning we dig down into the earth; then we set stones into the foundation, and then we build up the walls with rising courses of stone; and so, progressing slowly, we come to the completion of the work that has been planned” (68). Creation for Bede is like a the building of a house.²⁶⁷ Old English poetry makes this connection more explicit with such metaphors as HEAVEN IS A ROOF and EARTH IS A BUILDING. *Cædmon’s Hymn* rather explicitly articulates the creation of the world as for the benefit of men: “The two dative forms, *bearnum* and *firum*, indicate that the divine creative act is undertaken for mankind” (42).²⁶⁸ Earth is a building, made by God as a fixture of Creation for the protective and definitive benefit of human beings.

A third way to talk about the earth in Old English poetry is in terms of its wideness. Not exactly a metaphor, because of the actual experience of living in the earth, the idea that the earth is wide appears over and over again in Old English poetry. At first, this one might seem to contradict the other two metaphors. EARTH IS A MIDDLE, however, says nothing about its horizontal dimensions, just its vertical ones—heaven above and hell below. There are no necessary boundaries on the sides here. EARTH IS A BUILDING

²⁶⁷ Jennifer Neville explains: “In his commentary *In Genesim*, ... Bede compares the creation of the universe to the human act of constructing a building – much like the Old English poetic vision of the universe as a structure with a timbered roof” (67).

²⁶⁸ Michelet considers Old English creation stories to be anthropocentric orderings of the world: “These descriptions should be recognized for what they are: namely, representations of a desirable organization of the world, of order, and of fitness as the Anglo-Saxons conceived of it” (38).

adds these sides, however, as building structures, especially protective ones, must have walls. Calling the earth wide ignores this aspect of creation in its emphasis on the vast, empty space of the world, so big it seems endless. To interrogate the idea of the wideness of the earth, I'll return to the Latin Vulgate as a basis for understanding this conception of the earth. From dark, vacant depths ["abyssi"] (1.2), God makes the earth ["terram"] (1.1), gathers water to make dry land ["arida"] (1.7), creates vegetation (1.11), then animals in the water (1.20) and on the land (1.24). This account is another sketchy one, not relying on any details to qualify the earth, therefore allowing the vagueness to be filled by the individual's experience of the world.

The Anglo-Saxons did things a little differently, however, giving some more definite shape or restricting aspect to the earth. *Genesis A* explains God's original creative act as bringing the earth from "þes wida grund" ["this spacious abyss"] (103b), which "stod deop and dim" ["stood deep and dark"] (104a). This language, with its deep, dark abyss, points to the Old English hell, suggesting that the earth was built on top of that space. What God creates over the hell-like chaos is "þis rume land" ["this roomy land"] (114b), though the "folde wæs þa gyta / græs ungrene" ["earth was then yet un-green with grass"] (116b-17a) and "garsecg þeahte / sweart synnihte, side and wide" ["dark, perpetual-night covered the ocean, broad and wide"] (117b-18b). God then commands light to come forth "ofer rumne grund" ["over the roomy ground"] (123a) and watches the shadows depart "geond sidne grund" ["throughout the spacious land"] (134b).²⁶⁹ One qualifying detail for the earth stands out here—width. The roughly

²⁶⁹ Jennifer Neville reads this account of the Creation as generally antagonistic due to its negative language akin to that of the poetry of hell and exile—God shows his creative power by triumphing over chaos (59).

synonymous adjectives *rum* [“roomy, spacious, ample, extensive”] (BT I), *sid* [“wide, broad, spacious, ample, extensive”] (BT I), and *wid* [“wide, of great width, broad”] (BT II), saturate these descriptions of the earth, both sea and land.²⁷⁰ The nouns point this way as well: *land*, apart from distinguishing material from water and air, suggests a large expanse; *grund*, apart from signifying depth, can also mean the “ground, (a portion of) the surface of the earth” (DOE E); and *folde* is “the earth, the ground” (DOE 1), especially “as a surface” (DOE 1.a), as well as the earth on a large scale (DOE 3).

The earth is a huge, flat place for the original creation of the world in *Genesis A*, but also in other poems containing creation scenes, which Michelet identifies as “a literary topos in Old English poetry” (37). For example, *The Order of the World* mentions how God created “heofon ond eorðan / sæs sidne grund” [“heaven and earth, the sea’s wide bottom”] (39b-40a); and *Maxims I* from the Exeter book says that God created “eardas rume” [“spacious lands”] (15b). It is not only Creation stories that reflect the idea of the earth as this broad place. In *Juliana*, the poet describes the kingdom of the Roman emperor Maximian: “wæs his rice brad, / wid ond weorðlic ofer werpeode, / lytesna ofer ealne yrmene grund” [“broad was his kingdom, wide and worthy over the nations, nearly over all the great earth”] (8b-10b). Other poems mention its wideness whenever the earth is mentioned incidentally. In *Genesis A*, God says to Noah that he will release his flood over the “widre eorðan” [“wide earth”] (1350b), and to Abraham that he should travel in the “brade foldan” [“broad earth”] (1752a). Expansiveness of space suggests expansive power for those who create or control it—from God to Roman emperors.

²⁷⁰ Another closely related term we will encounter is *brad* [“broad, wide, then opposite of narrow; vast, extensive, spacious”] (DOE 1;3).

This wide earth does not seem consistent with the other metaphors that privilege earth's definite placement within a larger cosmological scheme and its enclosed and protective nature. These earths, I believe, reflect anxieties about the Anglo-Saxons' identity as a people and a Christian nation—they occupy the earth, safely in the middle of the cosmos, with firm boundaries above and below, and their earth is a building constructed for their benefit.²⁷¹ So how does a wide world fit in with this general schema? Does spaciousness not imply the constant threat of a hostile and threatening world all around? Is this earth not the space of exile? I would suggest not. The wide earth is seldom filled with anything threatening in its linguistic context, which contrasts with the language of exile which does express a dangerous landscape.²⁷² In exile, though the subject has none of the joys of hall and people to keep him company, the world is filled instead with ice, water, storm, cliffs, birds, etc.²⁷³ These things which fill that world are all dangerous threats or painful reminders of what is lost. The wide open world is free of these dangers; with nothing explicitly filling it, there is more potential to this neutral environment. Perhaps, conceptually, it is not even so open as might appear. The emphasis on the spaciousness of the world creates the feeling that something, not just

²⁷¹ Fabienne Michelet would agree: "The sense of space that can be reconstructed from creation scenes as narrated in Old English verse suggests an insecurity about boundaries, a constant fear of the outside (considered as a threat), and an anxiety to secure every thing in its proper place. For, when enclosures and limits weaken, chaos prevails and the world is eventually destroyed, invaded from the outside or dissolving as a result of internal antagonism" (63-64).

²⁷² Ruth Wehlau provides a good overview of the relationship between landscape and interior misery in *The Wanderer* ("Seeds of Sorrow" 5-9)

²⁷³ See Chapter II for a discussion of the landscape of exile in the Old English elegies.

empty space, always surrounds the individual or the society—the earth itself. This too is a kind of protection and even comfort.²⁷⁴

The Anglo-Saxon world is always enclosed, certainly by God, but even by itself. The opening of *Christ and Satan* attests to God's role in surrounding the earth: "deopne ymblyt clene ymbhaldeð / meotod on mihtum, and alne middangeard" ["the Measurer in his might encompasses completely the deep circle²⁷⁵ and all the middle-region"] (7-8). The two Creation riddles from the Exeter Book (40 and 66) present earth in a self-contained fashion, though preserving its wideness. The more succinct Riddle 66 reads in its entirety:

Ic eom mare þonne þes middangeard,
læsse þonne hondwurm, leohtre þonne mona,
swiftre þonne sunne. Sæs me sind ealle
flodas on fæðmum ond þes foldan bearm,
grene wongas. Grundum ic hrine,
helle underhnige, heofonas oferstige,
wuldres eþel, wide ræce
ofer engla eard, eorþan gefylle,
ealne middangeard ond merestreamas
side mid me sylfum. Saga hwæt ic hatte.

²⁷⁴ Rafał Borysławski explains a similar situation in his discussion of the relationship between exterior world and interior mind: "the apparent chaos of the exterior experienced by man acts as a protective barrier, both portraying and psychologically shielding his interior from the full awareness of the divine plan and thus, perversely, it appears as a divine gift to mankind" (200).

²⁷⁵ It is not known what precisely *ymblyt* means. The individual elements mean "around, about" (*ymb*) and "little, few" (*lyt*), which has given rise to translations from "circuit" (R. Gordon) to "expanse" (Kennedy). I translate "circle" to give a slightly ambiguous sense of enclosure.

[I am greater than this middle-region, lesser than a hand-worm, brighter than the moon, swifter than the sun. The seas and waters are all in my embrace and this earth's surface, the green plains. I touch the depths, descend beneath hell, ascend over the heavens, glory's home, widely reach over the angels' home, fill the earth, all the middle-region and sea-streams widely with myself. Say what I am called.]

The answer to this riddle is Nature or Creation, but note its reflexivity. It is and is not bigger than its own components—heaven, hell, earth. It surrounds the earth in a bosom or embrace (3b-5a), but also fills the earth with itself (8b-10a). Even though the earth of the riddle is clearly wide, as suggested by the “wongas” [“plains”] (5a) and adverb *wide* (10a), it is enclosed and contained by the matter that composes it and the structure of creation it is bound within. It turns out that wideness is comforting, even desirable, as Beth Newman Ooi also argues in examining four Old English poems: *Genesis B*'s vision of Eve, *Christ and Satan*'s third temptation of Christ, *Guthlac A*'s trip up into the air, and *The Seafarer*'s wandering mind all offer a wide space as an object of desire and power. These visions are all temptations that confer some degree of God's observing power over the world to the vicarious viewers.

There are times when the earth is depicted with topographical detail, but this detail is always rhetorical in nature, meant to emphasize some issue of power or identity.²⁷⁶ Examples from a couple of poems will give a taste of how the earth is used by

²⁷⁶ Much has been written on the use of a *locus amoenus* in Old English poetry, so I will not treat it here; see chapter two of Catherine A. M. Clarke's *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (36-66), John Howe's "Creating Symbolic Landscapes: Medieval Development of Sacred Space" (210-12), and chapter six of Hugh Magennis's *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (138-43) for recent treatments.

the poets to comment upon the subjects of the poems. The Exeter Book's *Christ II* is also called *The Ascension* due to its treatment of Christ's ascension to heaven, which the poet, Cynewulf, treats as the final of several leaps of Christ that aid our salvation. Human beings, while on earth, can capture and contain portions of grace in the gifts they receive from God; many of these gifts involve negotiations of space. One even seems to grant that godlike power of knowing the wide world which we have just discussed: "sum con wonga bigong / wegas wid-gielle" ["one knows the course of plains, wide-spreading ways"] (680b-81a). But it is Christ who makes most use of the earth to demonstrate his power and activities with us on earth:

Cuð þæt geweorðeð, þætte cyning engla,
meotud meahtum swið, munt gestylleð,
gehleapeð hea dune, hyllas ond cnollas
bewrið mid his wuldre, woruld alyseð,
ealle eorðbuend, þurh þone æpelan styl. (715-19)

[It will become known that the King of angels, the Measurer strong in
might, will spring up a mountain, leap high hills, encircle hills and
mountains with his glory, deliver the world, all earth-dwellers, through
that noble leap.]

The salvific activity of Christ is mapped onto movement over a landscape. Each jump from or over one high hill to another²⁷⁷ is a particular event in his life: his incarnation (720a-23a), nativity (723b-26a), crucifixion (726b-28a), burial (728b-30a), harrowing of

²⁷⁷ This image of jumping about hills and mountains could derive from Song of Songs: "vox dilecti mei ecce iste venit saliens in montibus transiliens colles" ["the voice of my beloved, behold, he it comes leaping on the mountains, jumping across the hills"] (2.8).

hell (730b-36a), and ascension (736b-43b). Cynewulf then exhorts each Christian to make such leaps so that they might ascend “to þam hyhstan hrofe” [“to the highest roof”] (749), or heaven. What effect does this rendering of the sacred actions of Christ, and even our own holy works, as jumps over a landscape have? Why is the world, usually flat and wide, now full of hills and mountains? It strikes me that poetically raising up high places on the earth highlights the extraordinary events of Christ’s life (and our potential for similar acts). Christ’s divine presence on this world alters the very topography of the default wide, flat earth. It is as if the earth itself is stretching up toward heaven as Christ makes his mark upon the very earth. Since Cynewulf’s audience would know the default status of the world to be wide and flat, planting mountains in the earth for these actions elevates their associative value by placing them closer to heaven—stepping stones, as it were, to God. Christ’s leaps just make him all the more powerful as he playfully traipses over vast heights and distances—the world, even in its topological extremes, is no trouble for God.²⁷⁸

When this earth is meant to be threatening, it is not, as I have said, the bare fact of its expanse that makes it so, but what dangers could fill the expanse—cold, water, and rocks in the elegies, for example. There is one additional way authors of Old English poetry communicate dangers in this wide world—waste. Land that is designated specifically as empty, desolate, deserted, and wild is dangerous. Such land, communicated by the OE terms *weste* and *westen* is most famously at issue in the Old English Guthlac poems. The question of control over the land has been well discussed

²⁷⁸ These mountains Christ leaps from could be examples of what John Howe calls sacred centers, which “combine[] a symbolic physical point with its associated social and religious constructs” (214).

with respect to *Guthlac A*,²⁷⁹ as the battle between Guthlac, along with his angelic protector, against the demonic forces over Guthlac's soul is articulated as a battle for the control of space; Guthlac builds his hermitage in a vast wilderness, formerly controlled by the demons, and repels their attempts to breach his borders, both physical and moral. Not nearly as much has been said about *Guthlac B*, though it actually does something very interesting with the concept of the earth. In Cynewulf's version from the Exeter Book, the titular saint's *eard* ["home"] (897b) is said to occupy a *westenne* ["wilderness"] (899a) where devils assail him. Cynewulf explains that "siþpan he on westenne wiceard geceas" ["afterwards, he chose a home in the wilderness"] (935). The land is given no features other than simply being wasteland. It is not actually important what is really in that landscape because its function as *westen* is due rather to the affliction of the devils who torment Guthlac as he is dying. It is a symbolic, spiritual wasteland. Guthlac's repeated admonitions about the placement of his body after death attest to the actual value of the earth. He says to his unnamed servant, "seal þis sawelhus, / fæge flæschoma, foldærne biþeaht" ["an earth-dwelling must cover his soul-house, fated flesh-covering"] (1030b-31b). Guthlac reiterates, commanding his sister be told to inter him:

þæt heo þis banfæt beorge bifæste,
lame biluce, lic orsawle

²⁷⁹ See, for example, Scott Thompson Smith's *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (191-213), Stephanie Clark's "A More Permanent Homeland: Land Tenure in *Guthlac A*," David F. Johnson's "Spiritual Combat and the Land of Canaan in *Guthlac A*," Alfred K. Siewers's "Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building," Hugh Magennis's *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (178-88), Earl Anderson's "The Uncarpenentered World of Old English Poetry" (71-3), and Paul F. Reichardt's "*Guthlac A* and the Landscape of Spiritual Perfection."

in þeostorcofan, þær hit þrage sceal

in sondhofe sibban wunian. (1193-96)

[that she this bone-vessel consign in a barrow, lock in clay, body without
soul in a dark-chamber, where it must for a time afterwards dwell in a
sand-house.]

The earth, formerly spoken of in the poem only for its emptiness, is now a thing of clay and sand, which will now protect his body in a functional way that defies the depredations of the demons who devalue the land by their very presence. The spiritual battle is one not only of control over a space of land, as has often been stated for *Guthlac A*, but also a battle for the use and definition of the earth in *Guthlac B*.

When Worlds Collide: *Christ I*

The bulk of this chapter has outlined the basic structures of each of the three realms of the Christian and Anglo-Saxon cosmos, plus elaborated on some native development of the metaphors implied by the traditional language of heaven, hell, and earth. Since these realms are often articulated as buildings, one of the entailments present in the poetry is that of doors or gates, which implies passage between the domains. We already know that they are conceptually connected if heaven is the roof of the earth, and that hell is beneath the earth, but I'd like to take a closer look at how these places are connected by doors and how passage may be made between them. How these spaces interact can be very interesting as certain metaphors are called upon for specific purposes. As a case study, then, I will examine the Exeter Book poem *Christ I* to show how these metaphors can work together or function independently to create an appropriate design of the cosmos to fit the poem's rhetorical arguments.

Appearing at the head of the Exeter Book, *Christ I* is a collection of twelve discrete but related lyrics we now understand to be mostly derived from antiphons sung in the liturgy of vespers during the season of Advent, hence the now more common designation of *Advent* or the *Advent Lyrics*. Each one begins with an invocation, signaled by *eala* in the Old English, which corresponds to the Latin *O*; thus they are called the Greater Os and the Monastic Os, depending on their date of development. Collectively the lyrics praise Christ, support the coeternity of the Trinity, and dwell on the incarnation to explore its mysteries. The lyric which has received the most critical attention in the sequence is a dramatic dialogue presented between Mary and Joseph on the mystery of her divine role in the incarnation. Abundant architectural imagery and metaphor in the sequence, mostly detailing the spaces of creation, is a well noted feature as well. In *Christ I* salvation is spatial: the created world is wide and we are vulnerable in its waste, but it is also paradoxically described as a hell-like prison, and also often noted as being under heaven. Our refuge, the strong, spacious citadel we should seek for protection is heaven, but also Christ himself, who is unlocked to house us. Mary is a doorway between spaces, through which Christ arrives and ushers us into his domain. Another apparent paradox arises as Christ enters through Mary, even as Mary lives within Christ. The poem is structured by the movement between precisely defined domains.

Let us first look at the three primary ways the earth is portrayed in the poem—as wide, as narrow, and as under heaven. The adjectives *wid*, *sid*, *brad*, and *bryten*, all meaning “wide, broad, and spacious,” appear frequently across the lyrics, as does the earth as the inherently wide *wang* [“plain”] or similarly suggestive *sceat*, a corner or angle (BT I), but also a larger surface of the earth (BT IV). In Lyric II, “eal giofu gæstlic

grundsceat geondspreot” [“all spiritual grace spreads through the surface of the earth”]

(42). Lyric III notes:

Sioh nu sylfa þe geond þas sidan gesceaft,
swylce rodores hrof rume geondwlitan
ymb healfa gehwone, hu þec heofones cyning
siðe geseceð (59a-62a)

[See now you yourself throughout this wide creation like heaven’s roof,
survey widely around each side, how heaven’s king seeks you going.]

Lyric IV is addressed to Mary, the “fæmne freolicast ofer ealne foldan sceat” [“noblest woman over all the surface of the earth”] (72), and Lyric V to the brightest of angels, [“ofer middangeard monnum sendeð” [“sent to men over the middle-region”] (105). The eighth lyric praises Christ as the wisdom which, along with God the Wielder, wrought “þas sidan gesceaft” [“the wide creation”] (239b). Lyric IX also addresses Mary: “þu mæra middangeardes / seo clæneste cwen ofer eorþan” [“you, famous of the middle-region, the purest queen over the earth”] (276). Then the tenth lyric repeats a phrase from the eighth, again praising Christ, who co-eternal with the Father, set up “þas sidan gesceaft / brade brytengrundas” [“the wide creation broad spacious grounds”] (356b-57a). And in the eleventh lyric, the poet speaks of the Holy Trinity as “brade geblissad geond brytenwongas” [“widely blessed through the spacious plains”] (380). Christ grants that the “eorðware” [“earth-dwellers”] (382a) can “weorðian waldend wide ond side” [“worship the Wielder widely and broadly”] (394). The adjectives noted above permeate descriptions of the earth to emphasize its vastness. Prepositions like *ofer* and *geond* also give a large sense of scale to this language. All of these wide-earth passages have

something in common, as opposed to references to the earth that do not point to its wideness—the presence of God, or some powerfully holy entity. Thus, God’s grace spreads through the earth; God can see all people on the earth; Mary is best woman on earth; the sun covers all the earth; God created all men on earth; all people are blessed through the earth. Each of these actions involves the completeness of God’s power and influence through the earth. God is magnified and glorified through the poet’s placement of his work over an earth that is wide and open.

A second way of describing the earth in *Christ I* is as being under heaven, with that familiar formula. Assuming for the moment that the house mentioned in the opening lyric stands for the earth, the poet says “nu gebrosnad is, / hus under hrofe” [“now decayed is the house under the roof”] (13b-14a). In the eighth lyric, “nis ænig nu eorl under lyfte” [“there is now no man under heaven”] (219) who can explain how Christ’s incarnation worked. And shortly after we are told the first thing people knew which “geworden under wolcnum” [“happened under the heavens”] (226a) was separating light from darkness. Each of these passages is much more limited and negative in what is happening on the earth—decay, ignorance, and darkness. One exception is a lyric nine note that Mary is the most marvelous “hada under heofonum” [“of people under the heavens”] (286a). In most cases, though, references to earth being under heaven are reserved for more human-scale and quotidian activities.

The most explicit articulation of the earth as a bounded structure comes early in the first lyric, in a famous passage which describes the world as a ruined house, which Christ the builder must rebuild. Considering the usual reference of what is under the boundary as the earth, and considering the increasingly enclosed nature of that world, it is

not difficult to understand the house metaphorically as the world. Robert Burlin certainly sees it this way in his typological framework when he discusses Ælfric's use of the term *hus* for the Temple of Solomon, a type for Christ (64). Johanna Kramer in her study of the poem's architectural imagery in the context of the Benedictine Reform, also supports this when she identifies a metaphorical continuum ranging from the house to the Church to all Christians to the body of Christ to the individual body. And, of course, the image recalls Bede's famous parable of the sparrow.

But the most negative of descriptions for the earth in all the lyrics occurs in the second lyric, which praises Christ's salvific power. This lyric uses the EARTH IS A HOUSE metaphor, but develops it into an even narrower, more confining quality to characterize the world as a prison. The antiphon inspiring this lyric begins with the invocation, "O clavis David" ["O key of David"], and characterizes Christ as the one who will unlock the captive from his prison-house ["de domo carceris"]. The Old English version similarly speaks of how "we in carcerne / sittað sorgende" ["we sit sorrowing in prison"] (25b-26a) as we await Christ who "locan healdeð" ["controls the lock"] (19a). The speaker appeals to Christ to do this for us, for now we live "on þis enge lond eðle bescyrede" ["in this narrow land deprived of a homeland"] (32). The idea of the earthly life as one of bondage in sin and of deprivation of a true heavenly home surfaces in these lines, made explicit with their metaphors for the world as a prison. That this narrowness is confining or painful is supported by the extended meanings of *enge* which include "anguished, distressed" (DOE 2) and "oppressive, painful, grievous, cruel" (DOE 3). These descriptions and their denotations connote the narrow prison of hell that we have seen. To those not yet saved or in heaven, life is hell on earth. To put this in conceptual

metaphorical terms, HELL IS A PRISON blends with an earth space to create THE EARTH IS A PRISON.

Though the world is paradoxically both wide and narrow, it is certainly bounded and represented as a house or a prison. Metaphorical representations of heaven in the poem are similarly complex, as we have seen, tapping into most of those we covered earlier—it is a kingdom high up, which we see most efficiently in Lyric X when the speaker refers to the angels who “in roderum up rice biwitigað” [“watch over the kingdom up in the skies”] (353). Most important for the lyrics, though, is heaven’s status as a fortress. In Lyric III, Jerusalem is hailed and called “cristes burglond / engla eþelstol” [“Christ’s fortress-land, native-seat of angels”] (51b-52a). The place of Christ is characterized in the compound term *burglond* as both a fortress and a land. It is also the homeland and seat of the angels. These features define the heavenly world of the poem, which is both a fortified city and a land, echoing the dual nature of the earthly world, though not now a prison to keep people in, but a fortress to keep people out. It certainly maintains the character of an enclosure as it is soon also called *eardgeard* (55a), a term which combines *eard*, another word for “homeland,” and *geard*, an “enclosed place.” In fact, the Old English terms for “home” or “native land,” *eþel* and *eard*, are used exclusively to refer to heaven in the poem (32b, 52a, 55a, 63a). *Christ I* relies upon the notion that heaven is the only true home, while earth is a prison we must escape.

I turn now to the question of how one travels between the realms of heaven and earth in these lyrics, a move which returns us to the idea of doors and locks. Prisons have doors with locks that prevent escape, while fortresses have doors with locks that prevent entry. *Christ I* identifies these two doors as the same point of passage, just from opposing

perspectives. In Lyric IX, the speaker explains a prophecy from Ezekiel, but which the poet attributes to Isaiah. The Old Testament prophet had been transported and shown “lifes gesteald / in þam ecan ham” [“life’s dwelling-place in the eternal home”] (304b-05a). No doubt desirous of reaching such a place, Isaiah looked “geond þeodland” [“through the inhabited land”] (306b), until he could see “æpelic ingong eal wæs gebunded / deoran since duru ormæte, / wundurclommum bewripen” [“a noble entrance all bound with precious treasure, an immense door, wound about with wondrous clasps”] (308a-10a). Confronted with this vision, the prophet wondered who could possibly “ðæs ceasterhlides clustor onlucan” [“unlock the lock of the city gate”] (314). It is not entirely clear where the prophet views this gate from. Has he been transported to heaven to view it and thus looking from its inside out, or is he always on earth, as implied by *þeodland*, [“the inhabited region”] (BT I), looking at the barrier from without? Whichever the case, this ambiguity must still suggest that the gate forms a barrier between two worlds. We have seen that both heaven and earth have an enclosed structure. Now we see that they share a boundary other than the fastness which forms the bottom of heaven and the top of earth, a gate. The gate is large, decorated and, most importantly, secure. Words for “locks” and “bonds” and “fastness” permeate the lines around this image. Worried that the threshold can never be crossed, the prophet is told that God will one day pass through, but lock them behind him so that only God can unlock the gates (317-25).

To this point the metaphor is perfectly coherent—heaven is a fortress structure with a very securely locked gate, which also serves as entrance into the earth, though none of us can pass to heaven from this side because our earthly structure is a prison. Heaven and earth are both places, both buildings, and both bear doors. What the angel

speaking to Mary says next complicates this picture in a very interesting and unprecedented way:

þu eart þæt wealldor, þurh þe waldend frea
æne on þas eorðan ut siðade,
ond efne swa þec gemette, meahum gehrodene,
clæne ond gecorene, Crist ælmihtig.
Swa ðe æfter him engla þeoden
eft unmaele ælces þinges
liopucægan bileac, lifes brytta. (328-34)

[You are the wall-door, through which the Wielder Lord alone travels out into the earth, Christ almighty, and just so met you, adorned with might, pure and chosen. So after him the lord of angels again locked you, spotless of everything, with a limb-key, the giver of life.]

Mary is a *wealldor*, a door in the wall—a unique formulation in the corpus. This metaphorical blend imposes the biological functioning of Mary as a woman who gives birth to Christ onto the existing structural schema of the boundary between earth and heaven. The blend is apt because the consequence of Christ's sacrifice is the salvation of the human race, which is understood as passage from the earth to heaven. Worship of the Christ fulfills this journey. But this movement is still not easy. The boundary between the temporal and the eternal, between the kingdom of heaven and the human world, is characterized as a wall, which is implied by the structural metaphors in general and the door in particular. Only Christ can unlock the door to heaven, which he has locked behind him after his birth. Referencing both human limbs and architectural elements, this

act of closure serves as a clear point of correspondence between the literal bodies involved and the metaphorical structures convey the relationship between the two worlds. It is important that Mary is left immaculate and no longer functions herself as a boundary between worlds. Any further travel between worlds will have to wait for another means of passage, which will be accomplished in the second coming, but that is beyond the scope of Advent lyrics of *Christ I*.

This specific image, this metaphor, has been much remarked on, but never explicitly in the context of the conceptual metaphors for the domains of heaven. There are two primary veins of criticism intersecting at the image of Mary as *wealldor*: one moving away from the figure of Mary towards abstract allegorical or symbolic concepts, the other returning to her personal, embodied, even eroticized being. Robert Burlin represents the first approach when he argues for a firmly allegorical understanding of the whole poem, justified by the medieval tradition of reading texts, as well as the world, through a typological lens which perceives correspondences between the Old and New Testaments, between the sacraments and biblical events, between the life of Christ and the life of the individual Christian, and between Christ's life and the end times. The original metaphor of "the word made flesh" inaugurates such an understanding of the world for Burlin. He explores the typological resonance of all the sequence of designations for Mary in Lyric IX: *cwen* ["queen"], *bryd* ["bride"], *hlæfdige* ["lady"], *bryde* again, and finally the aforementioned *wealldor*. Mary's queenship and ladyship are commonplace in patristic writing, as is the idea of a mystical marriage between Mary and Christ. The wall-door appellation, Burlin links to Ezekiel's vision of "the closed gate" (44.1-2) that can only be opened by the Lord, who then locks it again after passing

through; this vision was taken to be a prophecy for the virgin birth, explaining its presence in the antiphon which formed the basis for this lyric. The gate is also typologically linked to the “golden gates of paradise,” bringing together the figures of Mary and Eve—one closed the gates of paradise for us, the other allows them to be reopened.

Other critics point out that this kind of allegorical reading essentially reduces Mary to the merely passive means for allowing Christ’s coming and salvific activity. Mary Dockray-Miller, however, sees some slippage in the metaphors used for Mary in the *Advent Lyrics*. Considering that women could have been included in the poem’s audience, Dockray-Miller resists the poem’s metaphorical rendering of Mary as what she calls “a grotesque allegory of a giant, locked vagina: the gate through which only God can pass” (44). She then points us to the end of Lyric IX, where the collective speaker takes hope because, “nu we on þæt bearn foran breostum stariað” [“Now we look on the child before your breast”] (341). In this intimate perspective on the nativity scene, Christ must rely on Mary for sustenance at her breast. Dockray-Miller insists that “typology and poetry cannot quite eradicate the fact that Mary’s maternity, epitomized in the nativity tableau and in the closing reference to her *hrif* [her “womb”], is based wholly in her body” (47). Mary gains power through her body, as the active giver of nurturance.

The *Advent Lyrics* support both of these readings, though I also think there are implications beyond typological correspondence and feminist empowerment. The idea of Mary as a door in a wall is made possible only with recourse to an already existing system of metaphorical structures present in the Old English language. Novel images like Mary as *wealldor* thrust this metaphorical system out into the open. The conventional

language of this poem, and indeed the poetic corpus, reinforces these concepts. And, as Mark Turner argues, it is the ordinary, the common, the unconscious that are really interesting in their complexity. The unusual, the special, the novel—here Mary—depend completely on the common.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Collapse of Enclosure: *Christ III*

It should be clear now that the Anglo-Saxons understood their lives and their world in starkly physical, spatial terms, with enclosure the master structure behind much of this metaphorical thinking. The poetry examined thus far reveals the standard ways of thinking about the three major conceptual systems at issue, while focusing on particular poems can reveal some degree of choice in the deployment of specific metaphors for rhetorical effect. To review, the self is composed of four components: a body, serving as an enclosure for the other three; a mind, often another enclosure identified with the body, but sometimes personified as an animate agent; a soul, another animate agent; and a life, which usually operates like a force. Death is expressed in terms of the status or placement of the body: removal to a distant place; separation of the body and the soul; location down on or within the earth; and the loss of life as a possession. The cosmos is a large structure like a building, with its three primary components each themselves building-like structures most of the time, though openness in any of these places has its own effects. The self, life, and the world are fundamental parts of the experience of living. In the typical Anglo-Saxon fashion, they are all conceptualized in terms of containers or enclosures, reflecting desires for order, placement, and protection.

In this brief conclusion, I turn to one particular poem that evidences all of these concepts, and many of the enclosure metaphors I have been discussing, but follows their entailments to their logical conclusion—destruction. The poem is the Exeter Book's *Christ III*, also called *Christ in Judgement* or *Judgment Day*. Based on gospel accounts,

as well as material from Bede, Gregory, Augustine, and Caesarius of Arles (Gatch 193; Greenfield and Calder 193), *Christ III* is a meditation on the effects of Christ's end-time judgment on human beings and on the world. In this theme, as well as in the language used, the poem is quite similar to other poems or passages in Old English, especially *Judgment Day II* and part of *The Phoenix*, though *Christ III* is much more developed and expansive. The poem is split between the poetic speaker, who utters the opening (867-1343) and the closing (1344-1523), and Christ himself, who delivers a long lament in the middle (1524-1664), though this speech is punctuated by narrative intrusions. The narrative of the poem is not straightforwardly linear, but presents both salvation history and some kind of an eternal vision (Hill, "Vision" 239; Kuznets and Green 228). The opening invokes the analogy from Matthew of Christ's arrival as that of a thief in the night (24.43; 1 Thessalonians 5.2; 2 Peter 3.10), then discusses the condition of the world on Judgment Day. The general content of the poem is conventional for early medieval traditions of representing the Last Judgment: fire consuming the world, seas drying up, sun and moon darkening, stars falling from the sky, separation of the good and the evil, fear and terror of the multitude, etc.²⁸⁰ The blessed and the sinners each bear three signs of their status (1234-1300): the saved will be illuminated, receive a vision of heaven, and, in an unprecedented passage, they are given the pleasure of looking upon the suffering of the damned; the damned will see the tortures of hell, be fully seen by others, and watch the pure happy in their blessings. The audience is admonished to look at themselves from within, not from outside with physical eyes. Finally, humanity is settled in either the

²⁸⁰ See Richard C. Payne's "Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of *The Dream of the Rood*" for a summary of sources for some of these elements.

protection of heavenly *eðel* or the prison of hellish *hus*. The scholarship on *Christ III* has come to consider a homiletic tradition, most likely insular, as the immediate source for most of the poem, itself a primarily penitential work.²⁸¹

While the apocalyptic effects at work in this poem are highly conventional, ultimately deriving from Matthew and John's Apocalypse, this native Old English poem portrays these familiar events in terms acutely frightening to its Anglo-Saxon audience—the dissolution of enclosures, primarily metaphorical. Though few novel metaphorical conceptions occur in this poem, the selection and predominance of certain metaphors is telling. The poem most often selects for the spatial metaphors available to describe the concepts at issue: the enclosures of the self are opened as the inner aspects of every person are exposed, the enclosure of death is undone as the earth gives up its bodies, and the enclosures of creation are ruptured as the very structure of the cosmos shatters.²⁸² *Christ III* depicts a spatial leveling as boundaries fail, and inside and outside are mingled and confused.

Following the thief in the night motif, the poem details an assembly of the multitude of humanity at Mount Sion. The focus of this early passage is on the scale of this meeting and the nature of the earth at this time:

þonne from feowerum foldan sceatum,
þam ytemestum eorþan rices,
englas ælbeorhte on efen blawað

²⁸¹ See Frederick M. Biggs's "The Fourfold Division of Souls: the Old English *Christ III* and the Insular Homiletic Tradition" for a review of this scholarship and these sources.

²⁸² Conversely, where there was already disunity, there is now union, as sundered aspects of the self unite together.

byman on brehtme. Beofað middangeard,
 hruse under hælepum. Hlydað tosomne,
 trume ond torhte, wið tungla gong,
 singað ond swinsiap suþan ond norþan,
 eastan ond westan, ofer ealle gesceaft. (878a-85b)

[Then from the four corners of the earth, the outermost of earth's
 kingdom, all-bright angels in accord blow trumpets in great sound. The
 middle-region trembles, the earth under men. The trumpets sound
 together, strongly and brightly, to the course of the stars, sing and make
 music, south and north, east and west, over all of creation.]

By referencing the four corners of the earth (878), its status as a kingdom (879b), and its location in the middle of creation (881b), *Christ III* calls up the nature of the earth in its metaphorical fullness—wide, enclosed, and structured. Just as every human being is called to judgment, so is every aspect of the world. This world also feels full, with all those people, and with the sound of angelic trumpets resounding through all four cardinal poles of creation (884b-85b). The world has achieved fullness of space in the fullness of time. Just as the people are, the earth is ripe for the second coming and judgment.

To initiate these events, Christ enters into this world and this poem through the vault of heaven, but not through some kind of door, as in *Christ I*, which recounted his first advent through Mary as a *wealldor* (328a), and referred to the second coming as through ornate heavenly gates (308a-10a). Instead, Christ “þurh heofona gehleodu” [“through heaven’s lid”] (904a) in *Christ III*. This manner of entry is significant because it subverts the usual operations of the structure of the cosmos as built structures—Christ

comes straight through the roof, cover, or vault on top of the earth, with no opening apparently involved. This action augurs the effects of Christ's second coming on the fabric and structure of the earth. A good deal of the early part of the poem is devoted to describing these effects.

As *Christ III* continues towards Christ's central speech, the earth suffers widespread destruction, as it does in the biblical sources. Fires redolent of hell spread over the earth: "wælmfyrā mæst ofer widne grund / hlemmeð hata leg" ["the greatest of overwhelming fire over the wide surface, hot fire crashes"] (931a-32a). The way the earth is described in this inferno is telling. Yes, it still possesses its wide dimension here and throughout this section of the poem (974a, 991a, 1087b), but the earth which bears these calamities is predominantly the earth as a built structure, or at least those features of the earth that are naturally protective:

Gornað gesargad

eal middangeard on þa mæran tid.
Swa se gifra gæst grundas geondseceð;
hiþende leg heahgetimbro
fyllleð on foldwong fyres egsan,
widmære blæst woruld mid ealle,
hat, heorogifre. Hreosað geneahhe
tobrocene burgweallas. Beorgas gemeltað
ond heahcleofu, þa wið holme ær
fæste wið flodum foldan sceldun,
stið ond stæðfæst, stapelas wið wæge,

wætre windendum. (970b-81a)

[All the middle-region mourns troubled in that great time. As the greedy blast, ravaging fire, searches through the land and high-buildings, the widely-famous blaze fills the earth-plain with fire's terror, fills the world with all fire, hot and eager to destroy. Fortress-walls instantly fall, completely broken. Mountains and high-cliffs melt, which before protected the land against the sea, fast against floods, strong and steadfast, foundations against the rolling waves of water.]

Mountains (967a, 977b), cliffs (978a), high halls (973b), and walls (977a) are all examples and emblems of strong, sturdy enclosures. The poet even specifies that the cliffs formerly functioned as a shield possessing the power to hold back the sea (978a-81a). All protective enclosures and bulwarks fail in this apocalyptic scene. The fire will penetrate the very matter of the earth as it digs or burrows through all corners of the world: “ac þæt fyr nimeð þurh foldan gehwæt, / græfeð grimlice, georne aseceð / innan ond utan eorðan sceatas” [“but the fire takes through all of the earth, burrows fiercely, searches eagerly, within and without the corners of the earth”] (1003a-06b). It does not get much clearer than that: the effect of the fiery destruction is the complete loss of the protective character of the earth, no longer any secure structure, but open and devastated.

In a moment of typological correspondence, the earth suffered a similar fate when Christ was crucified:

Scire burstan

muras ond stanas monge æfter foldan,
ond seo eorðe eac, egsan myrde,

beofode on bearhtme, ond se brada sæ
cyððe cræftes meaht ond of clomme bræc
up yrringa on eorþan fæðm (1141b-46b)

[Walls and stones burst clearly, many along the earth, and also the earth,
disturbed with terror, shook in uproar, and the broad sea announced its
power's might and broke from its bonds angrily up into earth's bosom.]

Again the earth fails in its most durable and protective features as walls and stones burst (1141b-44a), and the sea breaks its bonds to overflow the earth, another destructive force like the fire (1144b-46b). The seas are elsewhere singled out as a victim of the fires raging through the earth (966b, 972b). Water and fire coalesce as the seas of the world burn and melt as wax: “byrneþ wæter swa weax” (988a). This is an interesting blend in which water takes on the more solid state of wax, only to be burned as fire's fuel, rather than quenching the fire.

The heavens also fall in this conflagration: “heofonas berstað, / trume ond torhte, tungol ofhreosað” [“the heavens erupted, strongly and brightly, stars fell down”] (932b-33b). Heaven bursts as the stars fall from their height, which they do again when they “stredað of heofone, / þurh ða strongan lyft” [“scatter from heaven, through the strong sky”] (939b-40a). The fire burns even the sky: “lyft bið onbærned, / hreosað heofonsteorran” [“the sky is burned, heaven-stars fall.”] (1042b-43a). This sky is strong, but cannot avoid being disturbed and burned. The word *lyft* usually invokes the sky in these passages, suggesting that it is only the physical part of the heavens, really part of the earth, that is being destroyed. But the heavens' bursting invokes the architectural function of the sky as the structure between the realms.

Even hell's integrity is compromised in these scenes as it must give the dead up from its hot bosom:

Hell eac ongeat,
scyldwreccende, þæt se scyppend cwom,
waldende god, þa heo þæt weorud ageaf,
hlope of ðam hatan hreþre. (1159b-62a).

[Hell, avenging shield, also knew that the Shaper had some, Wielder God,
then it gave up that troop, the band from the hot bosom.]

Hell's usual role as prison enclosure, here denoted by "scyld" and "hreþre," is superseded as it must release the dead for the Last Judgment. Though the underlying structure of hell does not seem to be destroyed, its protective function is compromised when it must open to Christ.

In much the same way, the usual operation of death is subverted. The ground, that physically enclosing, or at least positionally locating place of death, likewise opens to release the dead:

Weccað of deaðe dryhtgumena bearn,
eall monna cynn, to meotudsceaft
egeslic of þære ealdan moldan, hatað hy upp astandan
sneome of slæpe þy fæstan. (886a-89a)

[Children of warriors wake from death, all of mankind, to terrifying doom
from the ancient earth, they are called to rise up, swiftly from deep sleep.]

Figuring death as sleep and death as buried in the earth, this passage reverses the condition with waking and rising (echoes at 1024a-25a). *Christ III* reverses many of the

metaphors for death to show how that condition breaks down just as the structure of the world does. If death is bondage, the dead are released by God: “sippān deapes bend / toleseð liffruma” [“afterwards Christ unloosed death’s bond”] (1041b-42a). If death is absence, then the entire multitude of humanity is present at the Last Judgment. If death is the separation of body and soul, they are reunited as the soul takes on flesh again:

Adames cynn

onfehð flæsce, weorpeð foldræste

eardes æt ende

.....

on his gæste gehlod,

gearsa gongum, hafað ætgædre bu,

lic ond sawle. (1028a-29a, 1035b-36a).

[Adam’s kin takes on flesh, their earth-rest and sojourning comes to an end. [Each] loaded his soul though the course of years, has together both body and soul.]

This language of resurrection, whether reunion of body and soul (1067a-68b) or release from the enclosure of the earth (1155a-59a), recurs throughout the poem as it focuses on the fates of all people, the saved and the damned.

The placement of the body in death has been confused in the events of the Last Judgment, as has the relationship between the body and the soul. But the starkest failure of the ordinary working of the self in *Christ III* involves the functioning of the mind, or the inner principle of a person. The integrity of the usual structure of the mind is compromised as much as the breaking of the cosmos is. The first hint of this kind of

instability occurs when Christ comes to men at Mount Sion. The angels who witness this event are said to tremble in their inmost mind: “eadig engla gedryht ingeþoncum / forhte beofiað” [“the blessed host of angels tremble with fear in their inner thoughts”] (1013b-14a). This is not an unusual way to describe fear, but, in the light of what follows, can be seen as the result of the disruptive and penetrating power of God’s vision. The poem repeatedly states how the minds and thoughts of all people are now open and visible to God, and even to fellow men. These references to the mind are almost exclusively to its aspect as an enclosure, such as the “hord” of 1047a. Furthermore, most of these references include compounding expressions that point to compounding layers of the self: “heortan gehygd” (1038a), “heortan geþohtas” (1047b), and “breosta hord” (1072a). This intrusion and lack of all privacy is made to feel all the more severe when the poet combines four such expressions in one line: “hreþerlocena hord, heortan geþohtas” (1055). This particular construction conveys simultaneously the importance and the vulnerability of the inner self. All of these expressions suggest the protective sense of the mind as an enclosure, whose primary importance seems to be the protection of the vital components of the anatomy of the human self—the life-force (1073a) and especially the soul (1057a, 1074b, etc.). Before this day, however, no one—not a confessor, not oneself—can see through the flesh to the soul within:

Ne mæg þurh þæt flæsc se scrift
geseon on þære sawle,
.....
ond nænig bihelan mæg on þam heardan dæge
wom unbeted, ðær hit þa weorud geseoð.

Eala, þær we nu magon wraþe firene
geseon on ussum sawlum, synna wunde,
mid lichoman leahtra gehygdu,
eagum unclæne ingeþoncas. (1305b-06a, 1310a-15b).

[Nor may the confessor see through the flesh into the soul. And none may
hide in that hard day a sin unatoned, there the multitudes see it. Alas, there
we can now bitterly see crimes on our souls the wounds of sins, with
unclean eyes of the body, thoughts of sins, innermost-thoughts.]

But now, not only God, but all people can penetrate to a man's inner self. The soul now
clearly has the abilities of the whole person—we could not see our sins with our bodies,
but now can with our souls, given eyes of a sentient being. We must see through the
breast with the heart's eyes: “nu we sceolon georne gleawlice þurhseon / usse
hreþercofan heortan eagum” [“now we must eagerly and wisely see though our mind-
chamber with the eyes of the heart”] (1327a-28b). The mind or heart here seems to take
on the abilities of the soul, with all of these parts of the self opposed to the body, or the
structure of the self that keeps its contents safe.

Christ III recounts the absolute and utter breakdown of all the vital aspects of life
on earth, achieving its terrifying effects by systematically invoking all the typically
comforting enclosures of metaphor, only to follow the logic of the metaphors to their
logical conclusion—any structure or enclosure can be breached and fall. It is true,
however, that by the end of the poem, heaven and hell seem to be functioning as they
always have. Heaven is still the high seat of God (1216a-18a) and remains a place open

to the saved (1259b), while hell still functions as torture for the sinners, whom the blessed get to enjoy the sight of (1247b-51b); hell is assuredly locked for them (1259a).

But the comforts and security of heaven promised at the end, along with the promise of a confining hell, pale in comparison to the vivid accounts of structural dissolution throughout the bulk of the poem. The paradox is that, though the structures of creation perish on Doomsday, they remain whole and functioning in an eternal capacity, which perspective the poem moves to by its end. At least heaven and hell return to their proper functioning—earth has no such reprieve, remaining waste. And even heaven and hell take on an ominous tone with a novel metaphor for the fates of the souls of men—the poet claims that “þonne lif ond deað / sawlum swelgað” [“then life and death swallow souls”] (1602b-03a). Whether life and death here represent heaven and hell, or just take on metaphorical extension via STATES ARE LOCATIONS, it is troubling that they swallow souls, an apparent act of violence, but remarkably another act of enclosure. Death’s swallowing of souls certainly reflects the idea of the hell mouth, and life’s swallowing could be heaven receiving the blessed soul. Yet characterizing this reception into heaven as a hell-like swallowing suggests a disconcerting slippage of the metaphors involved.

The Last Judgment has always involved catastrophic consequences in apocalyptic literature. But, through an attentiveness to common metaphorical conceptions, it should be clear that the Anglo-Saxons, obsessed with eschatology as they were (Gatch 192), characterized these events in the strongest possible terms. All the protective enclosures cherished by the Anglo-Saxons—the body, the world, even the mechanics of life—all fail in the end. This is the worst fate imaginable—humanity becomes the ultimate exile. The foundations of life as they knew it are destroyed as the metaphors needed for

understanding these concepts also allow for their destruction. Human understanding requires metaphor for comprehending such metaphysical concepts, but these metaphors must participate in the fallen nature of temporal existence. The conceptual comfort and certainty offered by familiar metaphors, both inherited and nativized, fall away at the end. No longer can one feel assured of any enduring relationship between the physical world and abstract ideas. The Anglo-Saxons must, on some level, have been all too aware of the threatening possibility that metaphor and understanding are ultimately arbitrary in the face of Christian revelation.

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